


# **IDENTITY IN FLUX**

## **THE POLISH COMMUNITY IN BRITAIN**

**KEITH SWORD**



**School of Slavonic and East European Studies  
University of London**



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Finally, I would like to thank John Andrew who worked hard to transpose this text on computer disk and to edit it prior to publication.

Keith Sword

London, 1996



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# 1

## Introduction

### *Accounting for the Saliency of Ethnicity*

The great surge of interest in ethnicity since the Second World War has come about because ethnic and ethnic-national issues have become increasingly prominent in political life and international relations. Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan, writing in the 1960s on the ethnic revival in the United States, suggested that it might have been a corollary in the developed countries of the process of decolonization and the rise of national liberation movements in Third World states. 'Ethnicity' they wrote, 'is more than an influence on events; it is commonly the *source* of events'.<sup>1</sup>

More to the point, perhaps, ethnic issues have become of increasing public concern in advanced industrial societies of the West — in those societies where it was widely believed, following Marx, that group affiliation based on occupation and 'interest' (that is, class) would come to replace the traditional ties of kinship and sentiment. Anthony Smith has pointed out that ethnicity in general '... has not died the death that liberals so optimistically and naively predicted; on the contrary, it flourishes in our modern world, and it is exactly modern conditions that encourage an "ethnic revival"'.<sup>2</sup>

What, one may ask, are these modern conditions? To this question Michael Novak provides an answer.<sup>3</sup> He identifies four main reasons for the ethnic revival in the late twentieth century. First, we are living in what he terms the 'post-tribal' era, an age of mass communication and mass travel in which almost every culture has been forced to become aware of many others. Second, the new technology of our advanced industrial society has liberated certain energies for more intense, self-conscious activity. Third, ethnicity is a reaction to centripetal, homogenizing forces at work in modern society — the tendency for standardization and centralization in so many areas of life. This latter

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<sup>1</sup> N. Glazer and D. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot*, Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, 1970, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> A.D. Smith, 'Ethnic Myths and Ethnic Revivals', *Archives européennes sociologiques*, vol. 25, 1984, p. 291.

<sup>3</sup> M. Novak, 'Pluralism: A Humanistic Perspective', *The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, 1980, p. 774.

rationale for the ethnic revival is one that has been picked up by other writers. Ethnic self-assertiveness, argues Novak, functions as a defence against cultural homogenization, as a celebration of this or that identity as a means of building or sustaining the reborn community. The paradox is that as the 'global village' has come nearer (a process hastened by the spread of global media empires — in particular satellite television — the unique role of English as a world language, and the information super-highway) and the pressures for cultural homogenization stronger, there has been a countervailing tendency to emphasize local identities and stress differences.

Fourth, suggests Novak, the ethnic revival is a rebellion against soulless modernism. Modernization, he writes, has lost its halo and begun to reveal serious moral flaws. The critique of modernization was taken up in a stimulating essay by sociologist Peter Berger. He writes:

I have always been deracinated, cosmopolitan and totally unattracted to what Marx called the idiocy of village life. But while I have no desire personally to find some all-embracing *Gemeinschaft* as a refuge from the rootlessness of modernity, I gained an enormous respect for the positive human values of such intact pre-modern communities as still exist in the Third World: communities of kinship, tribe, locality and region, and the frequently moving efforts to preserve these communities under the violent pressures of modernization. Conversely, I gained a better understanding of the price exacted by modernity. I have no wish to romanticize tribalism. Rather I think that an appreciation of the human significance of tribalism ... can be of great help in a critique of modernity.<sup>4</sup>

Modernization, Berger states, breeds alienation and anomie, 'which is another way of saying that modernity has a built-in crisis which, once set in motion, is very difficult to resolve'. The best defence against this threat are mediating structures which he defines as 'those institutions which stand between the individual in his private sphere and the large institutions of the public sphere'. These are the the institutions which give stability to private life: the family, church, voluntary association, neighbourhood and subculture. Among these we may list the ethnic minority and its associational links

In similar vein George Homans has drawn attention to the social problems associated with modernization. Writing of the ways in which modern urbanization processes affect living patterns he observes that metropolitan society has seriously restricted and enfeebled the natural processes that enable people to form small, coherent groups. It may be, he continues, that the preservation of our society depends on our finding ways to strengthen what has been weakened, to make the natural formation of basic groups easier and more inevitable, or on our finding ways to transmit their vital essence to the larger groups that tragically lack it.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> P.L. Berger, 'In Praise of Particularity: The Concept of Mediating Structures', *The Review of Politics*, 1976, pp. 400–1.

<sup>5</sup> G. Homans, *The Human Group*. London, 1951, p. xvi.



But ethnic mobilization is not simply a defensive reaction to broader changes in social organization taking place in our societies. It has become politically significant because of its mobilizing power in pursuit of scarce resources. As Ronald Cohen has observed, from the Renaissance onwards, Western political philosophy has been centrally concerned with the rights of individuals in relation to authorities. Western democratic theory developed largely out of a recognition of this problem. Today there is an acceptance of the fact that individuals can obtain greater or fewer rewards because of their group identities and categories.

Democratic theory and ideology has shifted to include both political and group rights. In this sense ethnicity has been legitimized in political theory ... as a means of asserting one's rights in a political community in which ethnicity is a recognized element.<sup>6</sup>

A prime example of the impact that ethnicity and ethnicity-led political campaigns had in the United States is the 'affirmative action' programme introduced by the Johnson administration. Only now, some thirty years later, is the concept of 'positive discrimination' coming under serious scrutiny in US courts.

Ethnicity lends itself to such action because it combines, as Epstein points out, an interest with an affective tie. It is not only rational interests which are at stake, but the ties which bind one to fellow group members are those of blood, kinship, common background — ties which involve the emotions and call upon deeper loyalties.<sup>7</sup>

### *Defining Ethnicity*

There are certain problems in approaching the study of the Polish community in Britain as an ethnic group which will be addressed below. However, at the outset I think it is important to establish what is understood here by the terms 'ethnicity', 'ethnic identity' and 'ethnic group'. Sociologist Vilfredo Pareto wrote that the term 'ethnic' was one of the vaguest known to sociology.<sup>8</sup> Talcott Parsons has written that ethnicity is an 'extraordinarily elusive concept and very difficult to

<sup>6</sup> R. Cohen, 'Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, no. 7, 1978, p. 402.

<sup>7</sup> A.L. Epstein, *Ethos and Identity. Three Studies in Identity*, London, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> V. Pareto, *The Mind and Society: A Treatise on General Sociology*, New York, 1963 (1923), p. 1837. Quoted in M. Hechter, 'The Political Economy of Ethnic Change', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 2, Fall 1971. See the introduction to E. Tonkin, M. McDonald and M. Chapman, *History and Ethnicity*, (ASA Monograph 27), London, 1989, for an extended examination of the etymology and meaning of the terms 'ethnic', 'ethnos' and 'ethnie'.

define in any precise way'.<sup>9</sup> There is a great deal of truth in Michael Hechter's assertion that in the past, social scientists often treated ethnicity as the defining attribute of particular social groups but did not trouble to explain the nature and persistence of the phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> Although attempts to define ethnicity have generally focused on the concrete rather than the abstract, they have sometimes seemed confusing; they have sought to define the 'ethnic group' rather than 'ethnicity' and have stressed common origins, cultural links and minority status. MacIver and Page wrote in the 1950s:

An ethnic group is generally conceived to be one whose members share a distinctive social and cultural tradition maintained within the group from generation to generation, whether as part of a more complex society or in isolation. The ethnic group then is a nonvoluntary, interest-conscious unity, generally without formal organization and relatively unlimited in size, within which the members are linked together by both primary and secondary relationships.<sup>11</sup>

There are aspects of this definition which today might raise eyebrows. Ethnicity is generally regarded as an aspect of individual and group existence which is brought into relief during inter-group relations — often, though not inevitably, in the context of urban living. It would seem strange to many people therefore to conceive of an ethnic group living 'in isolation'.

Furthermore, the idea that ethnic groups are 'nonvoluntary' and 'generally without formal organization' needs comment. It is my belief that by 'nonvoluntary' the authors intended to draw attention to the simple truth that one cannot choose one's parents — one does not choose into which ethnic or cultural milieu one is born. In other words they are talking about ethnic *categories*, rather than *groups* (the difference being that members of a group have the consciousness of kind and of common interests which leads to collective action; those who are merely categorized do not). They did *not* mean to suggest that one has no option whether or not to engage in the life and group activities of the ethnic community. In referring to the absence of 'formal organization' the authors are drawing attention to the fact that by contrast with other social groupings such as trade unions, sports clubs or political parties, for example, the ethnic community is not necessarily defined by subscription and formal membership.

Indeed ethnic groups frequently lack a single overarching body which has an acknowledged representative role and to which all belong.

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<sup>9</sup> T. Parsons, 'Some Theoretical Considerations on the Nature and Trends of Change in Ethnicity', in N. Glazer and D.P. Moynihan (eds), *Ethnicity. Theory and Experience*, Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, 1975, p. 57.

<sup>10</sup> M. Hechter, 'The Political Economy of Ethnic Change', p. 115.

<sup>11</sup> R. McIver and C.H. Page, *Society. An Introductory Analysis*, London, 1959, p. 387.



Furthermore, the ethnic group generally lacks coercive authority over its members. As Michael Walzer has written in the context of pluralism in America, ethnic groups

... do not have members in the same way that the state has citizens; they have no guaranteed population. Though they are historical communities, they must function as though they were voluntary associations, they must make ethnicity a cause.<sup>12</sup>

The occurrences of persecution, discrimination or other manifestations of hostility from those outside the group can be an important 'cause' and help to bind group members together in their ethnic enclaves. Indeed John Rex has written of his belief that

... race and ethnicity as such, while they might be a basis on which men affiliate to or are assigned to communal quasi-groups, are not the primary element in what is called racial and ethnic relations.... What disturbs me about what we call 'race and ethnic relations situations' is very often not the racial and ethnic factor as such but the injustice of elements in the class and status system.<sup>13</sup>

This quotation from Rex raises two fundamental problems. The first is that an elision is often made between the situation of racial and ethnic groups. The justification for separating the two analytically has been the presence of phenotypical markers (notably skin colour) as a factor in race relations and their absence in ethnic minority situations. Second, that while visibility, hostility and discrimination are often found as a factor in race relations (that is, group consciousness develops among a 'stigmatized' minority), ethnic minorities are frequently 'invisible', and not subject to discrimination. The impetus for group organization comes from within and is often cultural rather than political-economic.

Talcott Parsons has defined ethnic groups as 'functionally diffuse, time-extended, solidary groupings' because (a) they are diffusely defined — they have no specific functions (such as those of a trade union); (b) they are trans-generational — membership being inherited; and (c) they are mutually exclusive (though participation, as observed above, can be optional).<sup>14</sup> My preferred definition, though, is that of R. Schermerhorn who sees the ethnic group as

... a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood.<sup>15</sup>

12 M. Walzer, 'Pluralism: A Political Perspective', in *The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, p. 784.

13 J. Rex, 'Preface' to J. Rex and D. Mason, *Theories of Race Ethnic Relations*, Cambridge, 1968, p. xii.

14 T. Parsons, 'Some Theoretical Considerations on the Nature and Trends of Change in Ethnicity', p. 57.

15 R.A. Schermerhorn, *Comparative Ethnic Relations. A Framework for Theory and Research*. New York, 1970, p. 12.

Schermerhorn avoids the issues of 'interest' or 'function' — that is, he does not attempt to explain the uses to which ethnic mobilization may be put but provides us with a minimal, and therefore a more inclusive, definition.

The way we define ethnicity is important in determining what will be studied and how the study will be approached. Concepts of 'culture', 'identity', 'boundary' and 'interest' have all been linked to the concept of ethnicity, but the emphasis given to them will affect the approach adopted.

A measure of the complexity of the problems subsumed under the term 'ethnicity' is that they have interested academics in a range of disciplines from psychology to political science. A variety of approaches has developed to answer questions on different aspects of ethnicity. While the political scientist may be interested in ethnic voting patterns or differential access to community resources on the part of ethnic groups — that is, he takes the ethnic group as a 'given' — the psychologist will look at how ethnic identity is constructed at the level of the individual: at psycho-social aspects of ethnic identity formation.

### *Approaches to the Problem*

The origins of ethnic group formation are various: conquest, settlement of trading minorities, seasonal or long-term economic migration, expulsion or flight due to natural or man-made disasters, and shifting of frontiers, to name but a few. We find then that the existence of an ethnic group often assumes the occurrence, at some point in the historical process, of human movement and transfer — often on a mass-scale. The circumstances of such displacement — be it voluntary or forced — are often a significant factor in the persistence of ethnic feeling.

The background to such movements, particularly where they are accompanied by loss, hardship and duress, can achieve a mythical quality as the story is passed down across the generations. It frequently acts as a powerful bonding mechanism, fusing contemporary social links as well as binding the individual to the experiences of his ancestors. Naturally, such groups often have a vested interest in keeping alive the memory of injustice since the emotional charge generated aids the maintenance of group consciousness and loyalty.

Some of the earliest work on ethnic minorities — at a time when the word 'ethnic' had not come into common usage — was carried out in the 1920s and 1930s by American scholars fascinated by the mix of cultures arriving from the Old World and settling in urban America. The process of immigrant adaptation to new surroundings was developed into a model by Robert Park and his colleagues. The so-called 'race relations cycle' consisted of four main stages after the initial



period of contact: those of competition, conflict, accommodation and assimilation.<sup>16</sup>

This model, in so far as it represents not a cycle but a 'straight line theory', has come in for criticism and modification since it was first advanced. For example, Marcus Hansen drew attention to the frequent tendency of the third-generation immigrant to want to rediscover the ethnic cultural traditions that the second generation had discarded in their effort to become American. In a further qualification of Park's theory, Ernest Krausz noted that many West Indians who had arrived in Britain after 1950 with assimilationist tendencies had encountered rejection from the white community and had become more militant as a result.<sup>17</sup>

S.N. Eisenstadt introduced the term 'absorption' to embrace the two-way process of adaptation and acceptance that occurs between the immigrant group and the receiving, majority society.<sup>18</sup> The term 'integration' has also been introduced into the equation. In the sense of 'pluralistic integration' it is the process whereby a group adapts itself and is accepted as a permanent member in certain universal spheres of association within the absorbing society. Even some of Park's original terms have been subjected to redefinition. From his minimal interpretation of 'assimilation', the term has come to signify complete adaptation by the immigrants and complete acceptance by the host society in all areas of social relationships. Nevertheless the model has been found useful by many scholars, notably a number who have written on the Polish community.<sup>19</sup>

One problem with the application of Park's model as it has been applied by his followers is that it is often not clear whether the model is being applied to the individual or the group as a whole. Furthermore, although it is supposedly dynamic, allowing for shifts in orientation over time, there are still pitfalls. In an ethnic minority group which is continually being added to by a process of chain migration, the model is difficult to apply. In particular, references to the 'immigrant group' may imply that this is a model which applies to only one cohort — rather than being extended over two or more generations.

More recently two broad approaches have been developed to account for ethnicity and its persistence. In the first instance there is the approach described as 'primordial' or 'cultural'. This stresses the

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<sup>16</sup> R. Park and E. Burgess, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, Chicago, 1969 (1921).

<sup>17</sup> E. Krausz, *Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, London, 1971.

<sup>18</sup> S.N. Eisenstadt, *The Absorption of Immigrants*, London, 1954.

<sup>19</sup> J. Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain*, The Hague, 1956; S. Patterson, 'Immigrants and Minority Groups in British Society', in S. Abbott (ed.), *The Prevention of Racial Discrimination in Britain*, Oxford, 1971; A. Zebrowska, 'Integration or Assimilation? A Study of Second Generation Poles in England', PhD thesis, University of Surrey, 1986.

individual's attachment to what is transmitted between generations by way of group culture and identity. It emphasizes the meaning that group symbols or, in Harold Isaacs' phrase, the 'idols of the tribe' have for the ethnic group member. This approach has also been interpreted as deriving from the classic 'functionalist' thought of sociologist Emile Durkheim and social anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown, in that it stresses cohesion and order and the unifying power of collective symbols. An extreme 'primordialist' view would see elements of such a group identity as in some sense immutable, persisting in recognized form across time, 'traditional'. However, this extreme approach has come under attack since it has been argued that what is important is not the immutability of a group's cultural matrix but the *belief* that what is inherited is in some way fixed, unaltered. Qualification of the extreme 'cultural' approach is necessary because it has become clear to social scientists that what members of an ethnic minority believe to be an inherent element of their group culture is often a borrowing or an adaptation from others.<sup>20</sup>

In an implicit attack on 'primordialist' approaches, Michael Hechter has written that, in the past, social scientists have often been content to consider ethnicity less as a phenomenon to be explained than as a given, a defining attribute of particular groups. The totality of cultural forms is often considered to make up the 'ethnicity' of a particular group. In this conception, ethnicity becomes indistinguishable from 'culture'. But, he maintains, this elision is misplaced and should be resisted. Ethnicity alludes to the *quality of relations* existing between individuals sharing certain cultural behaviours.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the 'primordialist' approach has been held to be inadequate in accounting for the resurgence of ethnic political conflict in the most highly developed societies. It has limited applicability in accounting for ethnic identification and change, or indeed for the dynamics of ethnic-cultural contact.

The second broad approach is variously described as 'circumstantialist', 'instrumental' or 'reactive'. As the term itself suggests, research conducted along these lines tends to investigate ethnic *relations* properly understood. That is, it sees ethnic research being carried out with due attention to social context, especially where competition, hostility or exclusion are detected as part of group interaction. There is a focus on social boundaries which frequently borrows from the work of Fredrik Barth. This sees ethnic boundary maintenance at some level as an essential function of all such groups. An

<sup>20</sup> See E. Shils, 'Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 8, 1957, pp. 130–45. Also, more recently, S. Grosby, 'The Verdict of History: the Unexpungeable Tie of Primordiality — a Response to Eller and Coughlan', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1994.

<sup>21</sup> M. Hechter, 'The Political Economy of Ethnic Change', *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 79, no. 5, pp. 1151–78 (p. 1153).



extreme form of this approach sees ethnic groups as interest groups, and the cultural matrix of the ethnic group as a tool or resource to be manipulated strategically in the pursuit or maintenance of specific goals. Along these lines Daniel Bell has written, 'Ethnicity is best understood as a strategic choice by individuals who in other circumstances would choose other group memberships as a means of gaining some power and privilege.'<sup>22</sup>

The 'instrumental' approach has a particularly powerful attraction for those seeking to understand why minority groups have not in all situations rushed to cast off their baggage of ethnic culture and group identity to espouse the culture of the dominant group. To social and political observers of the American scene of the 1960s it was a persuasive argument in explaining the persistence of ethnic voting in US politics.

These contrasting approaches underline the dual nature of ethnicity. It derives its inspiration historically from the line of descent but has its application contemporarily in the process of social classification and delineation of social boundaries. But does it make sense to adopt an 'either-or' approach? Epstein has suggested not, and maintains that in order to understand how ethnicity 'works', scholars must adopt an approach which *encompasses* these two extremes. Only in this way can we understand the full complexity of the phenomenon.<sup>23</sup>

Smith too argues that neither approach is satisfactory by itself. 'Primordialists' are wrong in suggesting that ethnic ties are universal and a necessary part of human endowment. Specific 'ethnies' dissolve and disappear while new 'ethnies' emerge. In some cases they are clearly invented by circumstance and design. On the other hand ethnic ties and sentiments cannot be reduced to the mere tools of elite manipulation. They are not the inevitable expression of capitalism, industrialism and bureaucracy. Neither approach can explain all ethnic phenomena. 'Primordialism' works best for those ethnic communities which are well-established and have persisted for centuries, while the 'instrumentalists' approach is best suited to explaining the emergence of 'invented' ethnies.<sup>24</sup>

The important point here is that approaches to the study of minority groups (often within the race relations field) which focus on 'power relations' and structural inequalities cannot sufficiently explain the drive to preserve separate ways as it is manifested in minority group life. Ernest Krausz, writing more than two decades ago on ethnic minorities in Britain, questioned whether the wider theoretical framework based on an analysis of power-conflict situations should distinguish between

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<sup>22</sup> D. Bell, 'Ethnicity and Social Change', in Glazer and Moynihan (eds), *Ethnicity. Theory and Experience*.

<sup>23</sup> A.L. Epstein, *Ethos and Identity*, p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> A.D. Smith, 'Ethnic Myths and Ethnic Revivals', p. 291.

coloured and European minorities.<sup>25</sup> In terms of definitions we would have to distinguish, he suggested, between 'ethnic' minorities, recognizable by means of their religion, language or culture, and 'racial' minorities distinguishable simply in phenotypical terms.

### *Polish Migration and Migration Research*

Studies of Polish migration, or of Polish communities abroad as ethnic minorities, do not belong to the mainstream of scholarly endeavour in this field. A notable exception is Thomas and Znaniecki's classic study *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, published between 1918 and 1920. Professor W.I. Thomas, one of the leading lights of the 'Chicago School', had learnt Polish over a period of years to be able to deal with Polish-language materials.<sup>26</sup> However, even the enthusiastic reception this book met with did not inspire further research on Polish communities by 'outsiders'. The majority of monographs that have appeared in recent times have been written by scholars from Poland or — particularly in North America — from within the diaspora communities. One reason for this has no doubt been the perceived 'remoteness' and 'inaccessibility' of Eastern European cultures and languages to the Western — and particularly the anglophone — scholar.

This is a pity. In modern times (in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) Poles have been among the most numerous of the world's migrant populations. Given her turbulent history Poland has seen both economic migrants and political refugees pour across her frontiers to put down roots on foreign soil. For Poles emigration became an issue of economic, social and political significance.

It is against this background that the settlement of the 1940s and the concern to maintain Polish traditions and cultural values should be seen. The Polish émigré settlement of the 1940s had very specific background factors in the wartime circumstances of its upheaval and the ideological basis for its refusal to return to Poland. However, it had a lengthy pedigree as far as migrations in general, and political migrations in particular, from the Polish lands were concerned.<sup>27</sup>

As a result the study of Polish migration and Polish minorities abroad is long established and did not disappear during the communist period. Indeed, particularly during the Gierek period (in the 1970s), such research and contacts were encouraged. The Polish diaspora was seen as a source of economic support for the homeland (remittances)

<sup>25</sup> E. Krausz, *Ethnic Minorities in Britain*, p. 135.

<sup>26</sup> M. Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology. Institutionalization, Diversity and the Rise of Sociological Research*, Chicago/London, 1984. See ch. 4, 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America: A Landmark of Empirical Sociology'.

<sup>27</sup> J. Zubrzycki, *Soldiers and Peasants. The Sociology of Polish Migration*, London, 1988.



and of political influence in foreign courts. Research institutes and journals were devoted to the subject.

It is worth perhaps surmising under what conditions British universities might set up institutes for the study of the Britons abroad, or devote journals to the subject. It seems an unlikely prospect. Yet virtually since the beginning of mass Polish migration to the New World there has been a lively debate in Polish academic circles over the emigrants' retention of Polish identity and cultural values. Novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz wrote as early as the 1870s that the Poles recently arrived in North America were threatened sooner or later with loss of national culture (*wynarodowienie*) and complete assimilation with the American or German element.<sup>28</sup> Sociologists Thomas and Znaniecki, who studied the Polish minority in America before and during the First World War, were convinced that only the first generation would prove capable of maintaining Polish cultural models: the fourth generation they concluded would be completely assimilated.

When Florian Znaniecki returned to the United States, at the beginning of the Second World War, he was astonished to discover that 'a further change in the Polish community had occurred, almost cyclical in character, between the tendency to assimilate into the wider culture and a desire to defend militantly its identification with the sub-culture'.<sup>29</sup>

Bierzanek points out that attachment to former ways is in no small measure due to the fact that migrants were torn from their traditional environments. Helpless in their new surroundings they grouped together to form ghettos or enclaves for self-protection. In this they were similar to other immigrant groups, but were ghettoized to a greater degree owing to their greater cultural distance from prevailing American culture. But, continues Bierzanek, what the people in Poland often do not realize is that there are certain developmental necessities which Polish diaspora communities go through. Approaches which view them as a dying, withering branch of the mother tree are misplaced. The Polish minorities are part of the host society. Also they are not static, but undergo a gradual process of integration and absorption. Too often, he states, there is a feeling that those from the 'Polonia' communities should be seen as 'half-Poles' or as 'Volks-Poles'.<sup>30</sup>

This is the result of Poland's history and geopolitical situation. Because of past vicissitudes there is a need for Poles to lay down ethnic-national boundaries, a need which is not as deeply felt in states with a less turbulent history and where, as a consequence, there is a greater

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<sup>28</sup> H. Sienkiewicz, *Listy z podróży do Ameryki*, Warsaw, 1950, quoted in R. Bierzanek, 'Stan i Potrzeby Badan Naukowych nad Problematyka Polonijna', *Problemy Polonii Zagranicznej*, vol. 4, (1966-7), Warsaw, p. 7.

<sup>29</sup> J. Wytrwal, *America's Polish Heritage*, p. 276, quoted in Bierzanek, 'Stan i Potrzeby', p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> Bierzanek, 'Stan i Potrzeby', pp. 20-1.

tolerance of ethnic-national dualism — bi-loyalism. So it comes about that some Polish writers insist '*albo wierność narodu — albo wynarodowienie*' ('either national loyalty or loss of national identity'). Hence too we often encounter among Poles a rather stiff and uncompromising attitude towards the retention of Polish identity and cultural traditions. J. Dobraczyński wrote in 1965 his impression of a visit to the Polish boys' school at Fawley Court near Henley:

Who are the boys being educated here supposed to be: Poles or Englishmen of Polish origin? For if they are to be Poles, then they should be sent off to Poland as quickly as possible. Only there will they manage to understand their homeland, feel themselves to be its citizens. If they are to be British — then they should be dispersed at once among their British contemporaries and not be subjected to a 'Polish complex' which will be such an impediment that at a certain moment they will want to be rid of it and with it any thought of Poland.<sup>31</sup>

This intolerance of ambiguity ('One cannot be at the same time an Englishman and a Pole') is typical of a strain of right-wing thought that flourished in Poland during the interwar years. It brought Dobraczyński into a polemical exchange with some of the leading figures of the *emigracja* — including the right-wing nationalist Jędrzej Giertych.<sup>32</sup> But Dobraczyński continued to maintain that he could see no alternatives (although 'I am prepared to admit that exceptions are possible').

The consequences of this are that on an academic level there has been a tendency for Polish scholars to 'measure' the degree of Polishness by retention of cultural traditions — according to language skills, attendance at Polish church, purchase of Polish newspapers, books and so on — rather than acknowledging that minorities of this kind develop their own cultures and sometimes more subtle forms of boundary maintenance; that the 'Polishness' of a second- or third-generation immigrant — whether it be in Chicago or London — is not going to be the Polishness of the youngster brought up in Warsaw or Kraków.

By way of example, Poles of the younger generation in Britain often maintain that they are Polish and maintain Polish culture and traditions at home. But the outward 'content' of this Polishness is often meagre. Furthermore, their identity as 'Poles' is often brought into question when they encounter Poles of their own age from Poland. (Factors such as language, humour, 'intimate culture' and so on come into play) Nevertheless the claim should not be dismissed out of hand. It is after all the individual's sense of group belonging which lies at the heart of ethnicity. On the other hand this subjective sense of group affiliation has to be reinforced by the objective criteria of social encounters. It has to be validated by other members of the group.

<sup>31</sup> J. Dobraczyński, 'Londyńskie impresje', in *Słowo Powszechne*, 3 June 1965.

<sup>32</sup> Exchange between Dobraczyński and W. Olszewski and J. Giertych, in *Horyzonty* (Paris), nos. 111 (July–August 1965) and 112 (September 1965).



As Erikson has asserted, ethnic identity is a psycho-social phenomenon.<sup>33</sup> Clearly if an individual's claim to ethnic status is continually denied by those he considers his fellows, then the sense of attachment and loyalty may fade. Members of an ethnic group may feel that there is an indispensable minimum of cultural diacritica necessary for 'membership' of the group. That is, birth and ancestry in themselves may not be enough. Without the maintenance of certain traditions, the group has lost its meaning. We must remind ourselves after all that the persistence of ethnicity is about cultural reproduction as much as biological reproduction. Elements of cultural knowledge — particularly language — are frequently used by such groups as boundary markers, demarcating the 'insiders' from the 'outsiders'.

The situation of the individual or group must be continually borne in mind, since boundaries can shift and harden in response to changes in power relations and other forces involved. The fault of so many earlier studies in the field — especially in the United States where much pioneering work was done — was to lay too much stress on the importance of overt cultural traits in defining ethnic groups. The approach based on culture in its more restricted, defining sense has come under question, since it has become clear that while outward signs of group identity are often eroded or changed beyond recognition, the group can persist without any obvious cultural 'content'.

Nevertheless there is often a rearguard action fought by first- or second-generation newcomers to preserve the integrity of their ethnic-national culture. The more demanding the boundary markers which the ethnic group lays down, the more exclusive the group will be — ultimately of course to its own cost. If the entry requirements are too demanding, potential members become 'rejects' — they are made to feel inadequate. What happens then depends on context, but it may result in the development of a youth subculture within the ethnic ambit (we are nearly always talking about the problems of younger generations in 'measuring up' to the cultural expectations of their elders); that is, young people develop their own social networks and, faced with common problems of 'entry' into the ethnic society of their elders, remain at a distance from it, while yet being distanced from the host society. Otherwise there may be a turning away from ethnic roots altogether, an espousal of the culture and values of the host culture and a merging of one's identity into the wider sea of national consciousness.

### *Ethnicity and Nationalism*

The fact that ethnic minorities are usually not on the territory that their ancestors originated from — they or their forebears have decamped

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<sup>33</sup> E. Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis*, New York, 1968.

from their historic homeland — distinguishes them from nationalist groups. Nationalist groups are usually autochthonous groups, which have become part of a wider society as the result of conquest or union.

Anthony Smith has suggested that the three 'main recurrent goals' of nationalist movements are national identity, national unity and national autonomy. Derived from these three goals he sees an 'ideal type' nation as including among its aspirations 'the delimitation of a compact historical territory, or homeland'.<sup>34</sup> Yet in his writing Smith, by repeatedly using the term 'ethnic-nationalism', implicitly acknowledges that, with nationalist groups as with ethnic minorities, similar processes are at work in binding the individual to the group.

To a certain extent we can see this process — the cultivation of a shared historical memory — at work among exiled Poles in Britain. It is for this reason that so much space in the earlier part of the book is given over to the historical and situational factors governing their settlement here. However, in attempting to portray the Polish community in Britain as an ethnic group, I am conscious of the fact that because of the origins and orientations of the settlement community, many British Poles would reject this label. They would reject the analogy with other branches of the Polish diaspora and other minorities in Britain that were formed as a result of economically-motivated migration. Even following the political changes in Poland of 1989 there are some who resist the label 'ethnic' just as they would object to the term 'immigrant'. There are several specific and unique features of the Polish community which make such comparison difficult — notably the political ethos of the leadership that was focused on the homeland rather than on the country of settlement. Indeed, perhaps the most obvious points of reference are to be found historically in the annals of political refugee and exile movements.

In this the Poles are similar to another of the exile groups which settled in Britain following World War II — the Ukrainians. Roman Petryshyn, in discussing the rise of nationalist movements and politically assertive minority ethnic groups, has drawn attention to the lack of discrimination in discussing such social movements. He developed a theoretical framework which encompassed all social formations utilizing descent culture. He distinguished four types of 'ethnos' according to their ability to establish dominance over four resource areas: territory, economy, social life and political life. These were: nation-state, national minority, ethno-national people and ethnic minority.

The ethnic minority is generally the weakest since it fails to establish dominance with respect to the four resource areas. Studying the Ukrainian community in Britain during the 1970s, though, Petryshyn considered it to exhibit traits of both nationalism and political ethnicity.

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<sup>34</sup> A.D. Smith, 'The Problem of National Identity: Ancient, Medieval and Modern', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 17, 1994, no. 3, p. 380.



In Petryshyn's view the Ukrainians were 'an incomplete ethnic group' both because the focus of their aspirations was geographically remote and also because they looked backwards nostalgically (or forwards in hope and idealism) rather than occupying themselves with present realities.<sup>35</sup> In this they are very similar to the Poles — another political exile community.

Czaykowski and Sulik pointed out more than thirty years ago that the Polish community in Britain, like all exile political communities, was an abnormal formation: it was neither a true immigrant minority nor a nationalist minority.<sup>36</sup> It was something like a nationalist minority, but without its own roots in the history of the nation of which it forms a part. Its roots were, and continued to be, somewhere else — in the homeland whose history and traditions it tried to perpetuate in unfavourable conditions. However, the processes of group recruitment and cohesion, problems of identity retention, boundary maintenance and assimilation as they are experienced by the Poles in Britain have much in common with the experiences of other minorities. Although the political factors behind their formation add a further, important dimension to the equation, in many other respects it is possible to apply the concepts and approaches associated with the study of ethnic minorities — which is, after all, what the Poles in Britain have now largely become. Hence, despite the caveats listed above, I have felt free to treat the Poles for my purposes as an ethnic minority.

### *The Polish Minority in Britain*

The Polish minority in Britain has not attracted a great deal of attention from academics. Because it is a white, and therefore largely invisible community, many people have been unaware of its true size. Since it has also been a hard-working, disciplined group making its way largely without fuss or commotion — indeed Poles have generally gone out their way to maintain a low profile — it is not perceived as a social 'problem'. Academics, like journalists, tend to be drawn to the pathological, rather than to that which is healthy and normal.

Most studies of the Polish community have been written by the Poles themselves. The first, pioneering study was Jerzy Zubrzycki's *Polish Immigrants in Britain*, which appeared some forty years ago. Zubrzycki was, like those he was studying, a member of the political exile settlement of the 1940s, although he subsequently took up residence in Australia. In the early 1960s, Czaykowski and Sulik, two younger members of the postwar political settlement, produced their study

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<sup>35</sup> R. Petryshyn, 'Britain's Ukrainian Community: A Study of the Political Dimension in Ethnic Community Development', PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 1970.

<sup>36</sup> B. Czaykowski and B. Sulik, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, Paris, 1961.

*Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii (Poles in Great Britain)*, the result of a Defoe-like tour of the country during which they visited all the major centres of Polish settlement. This lengthy book is often referred to as a journalistic study, but it contains many useful insights, much information and is an extremely useful point of reference for a study of the Polish community in later years.

In the 1960s and 1970s Sheila Patterson produced a number of essays on the Polish community. An Oxford-trained social anthropologist who had established a considerable reputation with her writing on the postwar influx of New Commonwealth immigrants, she was a Polish speaker, having worked during the war for the Polish Ministry of Information in London. As a result of her contacts within the Polish community and her intimate knowledge of its workings, she was well-placed to write on it, although unfortunately she never completed a full-length study on the subject.

Since that time, most of the work written on the Polish community has been in the form of university dissertations and theses, some by second-generation Poles at British universities, others by scholars based in Poland. Anna Zebrowska, a visiting scholar from Poland, completed a lengthy and detailed sociological study of second-generation Poles as a doctoral thesis at the University of Surrey. Much of the published work on the Polish community has been carried out by Poland-based scholars, for example, work on changes in the language spoken by Poles in Britain by Dr Elżbieta Sękowska of Warsaw University. More recently, Professor Barbara Topolska-Piechowiak (Poznań) has written on the subject of the identity of second-generation Poles born in Britain. Professor T. Radzik (Lublin) has written about Polish educational provision.

A more historical study of the origins of the Polish community was carried out by the present author and collaborators in the mid-1980s, although the main focus of this work was on the wartime and postwar resettlement period. Perhaps of more direct relevance to the present study is this author's doctoral dissertation, completed in the early 1980s. This was a study of a local Polish community, carried out from the perspective of social anthropology.

The main reason for embarking on a further study of the Polish community was the sense that, with political changes taking place in Poland and the passage of almost five decades since the establishment of the Polish exile community, a watershed had been reached. It was felt important to try to determine what direction the community was taking and, by focusing on the issue of ethnic identity, to try to anticipate the extent of involvement by the younger generation in future decades. The study has been written with a general readership in mind, and for this reason academic references have been kept to a minimum.

In this introductory chapter, against a brief background discussion of the nature of ethnicity and its significance in the modern world, I have



set out to explain some of the specific aspects of Polish migration and why the Polish community in Britain represents a special case. Chapter 2 is devoted to the background history of the Polish community from the upheavals and resettlement of the 1940s to the 1980s. Chapter 3 examines the consequences of political transition in Poland (the ending of communist rule) for the émigré community. Chapter 4 examines the statistical picture of the Polish community, looking at distribution and age and gender structure and trends. In Chapter 5 I have outlined some of the main structures of the Polish community at national level, while Chapter 6 is devoted to the structures and dynamics of the local Polish community. Chapter 7 examines some of the cultural traits and traditions of the Polish community. Finally, in Chapter 8, I examine the relationship between the younger (second) generation of Poles and their Polish background. This is the longest chapter in this study and the most important. The nub of the problem here is that of identity. To what extent are the second generation continuing the traditions inherited from their parents? To what extent do they feel Polish, what form does that Polishness take and how important is it to them?

In my concluding chapter I have attempted to account for the changes the Polish community is going through and to indicate where I think those changes are leading. If British Poles do succeed in prolonging the community's existence, what form will it take as we move into the twenty-first century?



## 2 Historical Background

### *Early History. Poles In Britain Prior To 1939*

Polish travellers, in the form of traders and diplomats or royal emissaries, began to arrive in England as early as the late Middle Ages. However, the first official ambassador of the King of Poland, Jan Dantyszek, arrived at the court of Henry VIII in 1522.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, Polish visitors included a number of Protestant scholars who came to England to study the doctrine and tactics of the post-Reformation churches. The best-known of these was Jan Laski ('Alasco' in Latin) who was invited to England by Archbishop Cranmer in 1548 and lived in London intermittently until 1553. In the eighteenth century more Polish Protestants arrived, but this time in search of refuge, as a consequence of the Counter-Reformation in Poland.

With the third and final partition of Poland in 1795, religious persecution was replaced by political repression as the main force driving Poles from their native soil. The new arrivals to Britain included both the politically compromised and soldiers seeking refuge. The trickle of asylum-seekers arriving in England continued throughout the nineteenth century, largely as a result of the harsh policies of two of the three partitioning powers, Prussia and Russia. Several hundred Polish soldiers entered Britain as refugees following the collapse of the 1831 Uprising against tsarist rule in Poland. In the following year the Literary Association of Friends of Poland was founded. The Association helped refugees from Poland to find employment and provided welfare to those without work.<sup>2</sup> It continued in existence until 1924.

The small contingent of Polish exiles was augmented in 1848 following the unsuccessful revolt in Prussian Poland and in 1863–4 in the aftermath of a further unsuccessful insurrection against tsarist rule.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> H. Swiderska, 'J. Dantyszek: A Polish Diplomat in England in 1522', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, vol. 10, 1962, pp. 38–45.

<sup>2</sup> The Polish émigré settlement of the mid-nineteenth century contained some unsavoury characters, however. See M. Paszkiewicz, 'Male grzechy Wielkiej Emigracji w Anglii', *Kalendarz Dziennika Polskiego*, London, 1992, pp. 60–7.

<sup>3</sup> Some of these defeated revolutionaries (numbering 232) arrived in Liverpool on 4 March 1951 after a long voyage from Constantinople. They had intended to



In 1830–1 it was estimated that there were 500 Polish exiles in England and by 1870 the number of Poles in Great Britain was put at 1500.<sup>4</sup> Many worked as tailors, shoe-makers and tobacconists or as apprentices to printers, lithographers and engravers. Poles also worked as music teachers, private tutors and translators.

From the 1830s onwards many of the Poles arriving in this country held democratic views regarded as 'radical' by the standards of the day. Their politics were at variance with those of the more conservative émigré circles in Paris.<sup>5</sup> The weekly *Demokrata Polski* (Polish Democrat), established in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions, gave voice to their views and also provided a platform for exiles of other nationalities such as Herzen and Kossuth. This tradition continued for several decades. The first edition of *Robotnik* (The Worker), organ of the Polish Socialist Party, was published in London's Mile End Road in 1893 by a group of such exiles. Among the visitors to this group were Jozef Piłsudski, who was to become the dominant figure in Polish political life during the short period of independence between the wars, and Ignacy Mościcki, later to become President of Poland.<sup>6</sup> While earlier settlers had left Poland for political reasons, from the 1880s onwards increasing numbers of labour-seeking migrants arrived from both the Russian and Prussian areas of Poland. While the newcomers were chiefly from rural backgrounds, most took up residence in urban centres, many gathering in London's East End. They found work in the furniture trade, and in slipper or cigarette workshops. Chief centres of settlement were Whitechapel and Silvertown, although smaller groups settled in Poplar, Leytonstone and Bethnal Green. Many were landless peasants from Galicia, stranded in Britain because they lacked the money for the onward journey to America. In Liverpool many Poles went to work in the salt works in Winsford. Their arrival in Winsford lowered the level of wages in the area by a third. Since they were intent upon saving in order to continue their journey to America, they lived in conditions of squalor, rarely staying in the area for more than three years. A contemporary medical report commented bluntly, 'To say

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continue to America, but met with such an enthusiastic reception in the North-West that eventually only thirty-two decided to continue their journey. The rest settled and were found employment in Lancashire. T.W. Scragg, 'The Polish Community in Manchester and the North-West', MA Dissertation, Manchester Polytechnic, 1986. See pp. 16–18.

4 These figures are quoted in J. Marzec, *The Role of the Polish Roman Catholic Church in the Polish Community of the UK: A Study in Ethnic Identity and Religion*, Leeds, 1988, p. 8.

5 P. Brock, 'Polish Democrats and English Radicals', *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 25, 1953, pp. 139–56; 'Polish Socialists in Early Victorian England', *Polish Review*, vol. 6, 1961, pp. 33–53.

6 W. Jędrzejewicz, *Kronika życia Józefa Piłsudskiego 1867–1935*, vol. 1 (1867–1920), London, 1986, pp. 75–87.

these persons are living together like beasts would be an insult and libel upon beasts.’<sup>7</sup>

The most famous Pole to settle during this period, however, had little to do with these communities. He was the novelist Joseph Conrad (Korzeniowski), who arrived in London in 1878 at the age of twenty and promptly began a career as a merchant seaman.<sup>8</sup> Other prominent Poles to arrive in Britain in the early decades of the new century included the anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski and historian Lewis Namier. During this period the majority of settlers arriving in Britain from the Polish lands were of Jewish background. However in 1890 a visiting Polish Jesuit, Father J. Badeni, estimated the number of Christian Poles as being 3000.<sup>9</sup> The main concentrations at this time were in London and Lancashire and in Lanarkshire, Scotland, where Poles had been recruited to the mining industry.<sup>10</sup> Certainly there were enough Polish Roman Catholics in London to justify the creation of a Polish Catholic Mission in 1894. At first the Mission was based at Cambridge Road, moving to Mercer Street in 1905. In 1930 the Mission purchased its own church, transferring to its present location at Devonia Road, Islington.<sup>11</sup> This was the second Polish church in Britain, the first having been established in Manchester in 1904.

But secular Polish organizations existed before the formation of the Polish Catholic Mission. The Society of Poles (*Towarzystwo Polaków*) based in London was established as early as 1886. The Society continued in existence for several decades and in 1911 founded one of two Polish schools which were being run in the capital before the First World War.<sup>12</sup> During the First World War Polish prisoners from the German army were brought to Britain. They were segregated and camps were established for them at a number of locations including Alexandra Palace, Feltham and the Isle of Man.<sup>13</sup> After the war many stayed on in Britain.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Scragg, ‘The Polish Community in Manchester and the North-West’, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> J. Baines, *Joseph Conrad. A Critical Biography*, Harmondsworth, 1971; Z. Najder, *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle*, Cambridge, 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in P. Sawicki, *Polska Misja Katolicka w Londynie, 1894–1944*, London, n.d., p. 7. Father Badeni was to write his own study of the Poles in Britain in the 1890s.

<sup>10</sup> See K. Lunn, ‘Lithuanian and Polish Immigrants to the Lanarkshire Coalfields (1880–1914)’, in Lunn (ed.), *Hosts, Immigrants and Minorities*, Folkestone, 1980.

<sup>11</sup> Sawicki, *Polska Misja Katolicka w Londynie*, pp. 24–6.

<sup>12</sup> ‘W dawnym polskim Londynie’, *Dziennik Polski*, 29 April 1993. (A copy of the 1886 statute of the Society of Poles is held in the Grabowski Archive, University of London.)

<sup>13</sup> Scragg, ‘The Polish Community in Manchester and the North-West’, p. 32. Material on the Polish prisoners of war can be found in the files of the Polish Consulate in London for the period in question, and in the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum.



A different group entirely, however, were those intellectuals active in the cause of Polish independence, who strove to influence the Foreign Office in the period prior to the Versailles peace conference. These included the leading ideologist of Polish nationalism, Roman Dmowski, and August Zaleski, who was later to become Foreign Minister of Poland and was to return to Britain for a second and longer period of exile in 1939.<sup>14</sup> Despite the ending of hostilities and the regaining of Polish independence in 1918, a large-scale repatriation movement from Britain did not take place. Although some two thousand Poles were apparently eager to return, shipping difficulties delayed their movement. By the time transport became available they had been discouraged by the deteriorating economic situation in Poland.<sup>15</sup> Consequently there were some 4500 Christian Poles in London by 1931.<sup>16</sup> Relatively few Poles settled in Britain between the wars, although the well-known artist Feliks Topolski arrived in London in 1935 and was to be based there for the next half century.<sup>17</sup>

### *World War Two and the Establishment of a Political Émigré Settlement*

The next influx to Britain of any size followed the outbreak of the Second World War. Consistent with Polish–British diplomatic agreements, some Polish naval and air force units had been ordered to make their way to Britain immediately following the German attack on 1 September 1939.

In the wake of the German *Blitzkrieg*, the Polish military situation was rendered hopeless by the entry of Soviet troops on 17 September, and the Polish commander ordered a general withdrawal to the territory of neighbouring states. In Romania the President, the government, diplomats, senior military commanders and thousands of troops were interned by the authorities. However, under the terms of the 1935 Constitution, President Mościcki was able to transfer his powers to a successor. The chosen candidate was Władysław Raczkiewicz, at that time in Paris. Subsequently Raczkiewicz asked General Władysław Sikorski to form a government in exile and the French assigned the Poles premises at Angers, outside Paris.

In the months that followed Sikorski and his colleagues attempted to rebuild Polish military units preparing to fight alongside the French.

<sup>14</sup> N. Davies, 'The Poles in Great Britain, 1914–1919', *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 50, 1972, no. 118, pp. 63–9. Also Paul Latawski, 'Great Britain and the Rebirth of Poland: Official and Unofficial Influences on British Policy, 1914–18', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Indiana, 1985.

<sup>15</sup> J. Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain*, The Hague, 1956, p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> Topolski (1907–89) who, in the course of his lifetime, had numerous exhibitions in London, was appointed an official war artist by the British Government during World War Two.

Manpower resources for the units were limited. Fresh recruits came chiefly from Polish emigrants in France, some from traditional settlements of the Polish diaspora in the New World, and from the many thousands of Poles who made the long and hazardous journey to the West (some having made their way out of internment camps in Hungary and Romania). By early 1940 there were some 80,000 troops in Polish formations in France, though many were still undergoing training. In April 1940 the Podhale Rifle Brigade sailed from France to take part in the ill-fated Narvik operation. With the defeat of France in May 1940, the Poles were forced to flee once again. The President, Prime Minister Sikorski and his government and remnants of the Polish army in France were evacuated to Britain on Royal Navy and Polish vessels. The official figure of military evacuees was 19,457 — less than a quarter of the total raised in France.<sup>18</sup> Thereafter, for as long as the war lasted, offices in central London locations such as Knightsbridge, Kensington, Piccadilly and Mayfair became the home of the Polish apparatus of state and the focus of Polish hopes for liberation and independence. They became the nerve centres for Polish diplomatic activity, for the co-ordination of military effort abroad and for the resistance struggle in Poland itself. Polish military headquarters were based at the Rubens Hotel, near Victoria Station.<sup>19</sup>

The evacuees from France supplemented the small number of units already in Britain. From among the soldiers evacuated from France the Polish First Corps was formed. Small numbers of Polish volunteers continued to leave the homeland for neutral territory and thence to Britain. Initially the troops were billeted in Scotland where they were allotted coastal defence duties. Polish air force units were reunited and expanded. Polish fighter pilots made a major contribution during the Battle of Britain in the autumn of 1940.

Polish troops from Britain were eventually to participate the Allied liberation campaign in north-west Europe. General Maczek's armoured division fought with distinction, making a notable contribution at Falaise. And the Polish Independent Parachute Brigade under Colonel S. Sosabowski took part in the Arnhem operation alongside their British colleagues. The largest element, though, of the postwar Polish settlement in Britain came via the 'eastern route'. Following the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939 and the subsequent annexation of eastern Poland by Stalin, large-scale deportations of the population began. Not only were captured soldiers of the Polish army and frontier corps interned, but from February 1940 the occupation authorities began to deport Polish civilians from all walks of life (and of all ages) to the Soviet interior. The three main deportation waves of 1940 (February, April, June) were

<sup>18</sup> J. Garlinski, *Poland in The Second World War*, London, 1985, p. 82.

<sup>19</sup> A plaque on the wall of this hotel in Buckingham Palace Road commemorates the role it played during these war years. An account of diplomatic events in London during the war years is given in E. Raczynski, *In Allied London*, London, 1962.



followed by a further movement from the freshly-seized Baltic states — including the Vilnius region, which had been Polish before the war — in the summer of 1941. Altogether, Polish Government sources estimate that a million and a half Poles were taken by this and other means both to prisons and to work in Soviet labour camps and collective farms.<sup>20</sup>

When Hitler launched his armies against the Soviet Union in June 1941 the situation of Stalin's captive Poles changed dramatically. Within weeks Polish–Soviet diplomatic relations had been re-established and provision made for the release of all Polish citizens held in Soviet prisons and labour camps. There was also agreement that a new Polish army, recruited from these released prisoners, should be formed on Soviet soil. General Władysław Anders was freed from Moscow's Lubianka jail after almost two years of captivity and given the task of organizing the new force.<sup>21</sup> Owing partly to supply problems and partly to doubts on the Polish side about the good intentions of their former jailers, the Polish force formed by Anders was evacuated to Persia (Iran) in two waves during 1942. Altogether over 115,000 Poles — mainly troops, but also including civilian dependents — were transferred to British care and control in the Middle East. Accommodation was found for the women and children, including orphans, in a variety of locations, but the largest group found their way to camps in British East Africa. The troops came under the aegis of British Middle East Command and after a period of rest and recuperation were moved, via Iraq, to Palestine. There they were merged with General Kopanski's Carpathian Brigade to form the Polish Second Corps.<sup>22</sup> During 1944 the Second Corps under General Anders' command took part in the Italian campaign to great effect. Their most memorable achievement was the storming of the German positions at Monte Cassino (May 1944) but further victories were gained at Bologna and Ancona. It was in the Middle East and in Italy — particularly in the immediate aftermath of hostilities — that a 'little exile world' created by the exiled Poles flourished.<sup>23</sup>

The Polish force was not merely an army but had to provide schooling for cadets of both sexes. It had a cultural and press section which produced reading material. There was a unique atmosphere of comradeship and self-sufficiency in conditions which, although wartime, were nigh idyllic after their Soviet travails. They had a commander who was revered as a latter-day Moses for having engineered their exodus

20 K. Sword, *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939–48*, London, 1994.

21 W. Anders, *An Army in Exile*, Newtown, Wales, 1949.

22 The Carpathian Brigade was originally formed in the Middle East and was so named because it expected to return to Poland from the south (and therefore to cross the Carpathian Mountains).

23 The term 'little exile world' is used by Sheila Patterson. See S. Patterson, 'Polish London', in R. Glass *et al.* (eds), *London. Aspects of Change*, London, 1964, pp. 309–43.



from the land of their captivity. These troops and their dependants did not begin to arrive in Britain until the autumn of 1946.

A further wartime route to Britain for some Poles led via Germany, but here there were many subcategories. Largest was that of the Poles in *Wehrmacht* service, most forced to enlist from the areas of Poland annexed to the Reich in 1939. Thousands of such *Wehrmacht* Poles crossed the lines in Italy and in north-west Europe. Most were simply given a change of uniform and drafted into 'allied' Polish units. They began to arrive in Britain as early as 1943, having deserted or been captured during the North Africa campaign. By the end of the war these numbered some 88,000.<sup>24</sup>

Also via the 'western' route came Poles forced to work in German agriculture or industry. Many had been taken to the Reich as children. At the war's end they found themselves in DP camps faced with the decision of whether or not to return to Poland. Some had family members in the Polish forces and so came to Britain as dependent relatives. A small number of people were also able to make their way out of Poland clandestinely during 1945–6, defying the communist authorities which had taken control.

Other categories included Polish prisoners of war, some of whom had been held since the 1939 campaign, and some two thousand concentration-camp inmates. But perhaps the most significant of the arrivals via the western route — if not the most numerous subcategory — were the members of the underground Home Army (AK) who had been taken into German captivity following the collapse of the Warsaw Rising. Large numbers had made their way to Italy and, having made contact with General Anders' forces, were enlisted. By contrast with those who had spent the war years in exile, they had endured the long years of occupation in Poland, and had maintained the struggle against the enemy forces to the last. The members of this group were extremely patriotic and regarded themselves as an elite.

The complex web woven by the movement of these hundreds of thousands of individuals is too intricate to tease out with any accuracy. But it is important to remember that the Poles who arrived in Britain during the 1940s had left their homeland at different times. Their memories of occupation were often different, and their experiences *en route* varied enormously. Also, of course, they arrived in Britain at different times in the course of the decade — which meant that some had had a much greater chance to acclimatize and to adapt.

So much for movement. But the origins of the 'political emigration' in Britain — the change of status from combatant to exile — are usually traced to February 1945, the date of the Great Power conference at Yalta. It was during their meeting in the Crimea that representatives of the 'Big Three' Allied powers confirmed their decision to hand over

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<sup>24</sup> A. Liebich, *Na obcej ziemi*, London, 1974, pp. 64–70.

half of Poland's pre-war territory to Stalin and conceded that the future government of Poland would be based on the 'Provisional Government' established with backing from Moscow (in January 1945), subject to the holding of 'free and unfettered' elections. The decision dealt a shattering blow to the Poles who had fought and campaigned for the liberation of their homeland for more than five years. There was a strong sense of betrayal, of having been abandoned by their wartime allies.

In the Polish capital Warsaw, the communist government was recognized by Poland's wartime allies, Britain and the United States, in July 1945. At the same time recognition was withdrawn from the exile government in London, which nevertheless continued in existence as a government of national protest.

The debate among Poles in the West about whether or not to return to Poland was a long and agonizing one. It was complicated by a number of factors: (i) the return to Poland of Stanisław Mikołajczyk, who had in 1943 succeeded Sikorski as premier in exile; (ii) the rival propaganda campaigns waged by the communist regime and the émigré political establishment; (iii) the loss of their homes by those who had previously lived in eastern Poland, now Soviet territory; (iv) the fears of those who had already passed through the Soviet prison and camp system that they might again fall victim to the dreaded NKVD if they returned to Poland; (v) the separation from families which many had not seen for several years.

In émigré circles pressure against return built up. This was especially the case in Italy among the Polish Second Corps, most of whose members were from eastern Poland. Repatriation was widely regarded as a form of voting with one's feet for the New Order in Poland. According to this view, paradoxically, return to the homeland signified betrayal of the national cause. It was taken to mean that the repatriate sympathized with the new regime in Warsaw, recognized the legitimacy of a government constructed without any pretence of democratic procedure and accepted the loss of territory to Moscow. This was a very uncompromising stance and ignored the complications arising from family ties and separation. The scattering of large sections of Poland's population beyond her frontiers and around the globe left many individuals unsure of the whereabouts of close kin. If they could not contact families or feared that they were dead, there was little point in risking return. But most were able to establish contact by letter fairly quickly and, given the slim chances of successfully bringing relatives out of Poland, agonized over whether to return to join them. Zygmunt Nowakowski, the celebrated columnist and pamphleteer, wrote at this time that it was difficult to counsel someone against return who was called home by his wife, children, mother — someone who was aware



that he was needed there, someone who could not bear the pressure of longing and homesickness.<sup>25</sup>

But the aim of the Polish authorities in London was to attempt to retain their people (symbolically at least) in ranks. They wanted the émigré settlement to have a mass character. The more people who could be induced not to return, the louder their voice would be and the greater the resulting pressure on the Western powers. The Polish émigré camp aimed to act as a thorn in the side of the Warsaw regime, drawing the world's attention to its hollow rhetoric and its stifling of human and civil rights. It aimed to uphold the true values of Polish independence and maintain certain traditions which the communists were bent on erasing from the national memory. More generally it also aimed to counter communist expansion throughout the world. The prevailing mood for many was therefore one of 'wait and see'. People watched events as they unfolded at home and waited — awaiting particularly the outcome of the elections provided for under the Crimea accords.

The anticipated elections did not take place until January 1947. When they did take place they were not the 'free and unfettered elections' which had been agreed at Yalta. They had been preceded by a systematic campaign of political terror and intimidation masterminded by Soviet security agencies. Nevertheless it became clear that, despite Western protests, there was nothing that could be done to save Poland from Soviet domination. For those Poles in the West who had been awaiting the outcome of the vote, there was little need for further indecision. Those who could not face the uncertain future which awaited them in Poland could not remain in uniform for ever. The British Government had decided to demobilize the Polish troops who did not want to return. They were invited to join a Polish Resettlement Corps as a transitional stage to civilian employment in Britain.

During 1947 enlistment to the Polish Resettlement Corps got into full swing and the British authorities began to exert pressure on those waverers who were still unwilling to exercise their option. The year 1947 marked a watershed for other reasons. With the death of President Raczkiewicz in June, an important link with the wartime emigracja disappeared. Despite the pressures against repatriation, over 105,000 Polish soldiers did return — a serious blow to the Polish Government in London. A number of politicians, officials and military figures returned, which also contributed to weakening the London Poles' cause. Apart from Mikołajczyk, the returnees included former ministers Ludwik Grosfeld, Zygmunt Kaczyński, Henryk Strasburger (who became Warsaw's new ambassador in London) and Stanisław Kot (who became ambassador in Italy). Senior military figures who returned included Generals Boruta-Spiechowicz, Prugar-Ketling, and Modelski

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<sup>25</sup> Z. Nowakowski, *Jesien i wiosna ludów*, London, 1946, pp. 26, 33.

— the latter soon arriving back in Britain as head of the Polish Military Mission. Several literary figures also went back, including Władysław Broniewski, Konstanty Gałczyński and Julian Tuwim.

In the course of the late 1940s the demobilized Polish troops were joined by some 33,000 dependants and by other civilian Poles — the largest group of which were the 14,000 European Volunteer Workers recruited from DP camps on the continent to jobs in British industry.<sup>26</sup> The settlement population included many educated people, some with professional qualifications (lawyers, judges, journalists, engineers, army officers). However, with the exception of doctors and pharmacists, whose qualifications were recognized, most had to enter the British labour market at a much lower level: they became 'declassified'. Occupations 'approved' by the Ministry of Labour into which large numbers of Poles moved from the Resettlement Corps included building and construction, agriculture, coal-mining, the hotel and restaurant trade, brick-making, weaving and cotton-spinning, iron and steel-making and the railways.<sup>27</sup>

The Polish units arriving in postwar Britain were housed in vacated service camps. Relatives were housed in similar accommodation, often that vacated by US or Canadian troops. There was no alternative given the housing shortage of the time. Conditions were not ideal but many Poles — especially those from poorer backgrounds — became attached to the rough and ready conditions and life in 'prefab' units. In an era of rationing, garden plots were started and chickens were kept in some camps as residents attempted to supplement their official diet. Inevitably some of the camps began to take on the appearance of villages in Eastern Poland.

In summary, it is important to bear in mind a number of points about the postwar Polish settlement in Britain, since the circumstances in which they arrived were radically different from other major groups of immigrants to this country in the postwar years. The Poles came for the most part in organized, disciplined groups (including schools and hospitals, as well as military units). They were part of a structured social grouping with its own political and military leadership and a sizeable cultural and literary elite. They arrived within a relatively short space of time — the largest numbers coming to Britain in the course of a three to four year period (1946–9). Being in the main a military settlement, it was predominantly a population of young, single males, although the gender imbalance was partially eased by the arrival

26 J.A. Tannahill, *European Volunteer Workers in Britain*, Manchester, 1958; E. Stadulis, 'The Resettlement of Displaced Persons in the United Kingdom', *Population Studies*, vol. 5, 1952, no. 3, pp. 207–37; D. Kay and R. Miles, *Refugees or Migrant Workers? European Volunteer Workers in Britain, 1946–1951*, London, 1992.

27 K. Sword (with N. Davies and J. Ciechanowski), *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain*, London, 1989, appendix 7, p. 470.



of families from the Middle East and East Africa, and also partly by the arrival of Polish females as EVWs from Germany. Unlike subsequent immigration waves from former British colonial territories, the Polish newcomers had few traditional ties with Britain and little familiarity with the English language and culture. Although economic factors no doubt played a part in the decisions many took to remain, the majority of the Poles were unwilling settlers in the sense that, with the defeat of the Axis powers, they had expected to return to their homeland. Many harboured a strong sense of resentment towards the British for having 'sold them out' to the Soviets at Yalta.<sup>28</sup>

### *Political Fragmentation and Economic Consolidation, 1947–56*

So often in history the defeated and the oppressed have become inarticulate. History has been written by the victors. Enlarging on this theme in an essay on European political emigrations published almost a quarter of a century ago, historian Robert C. Williams explained the traditional reluctance of scholars to account for the views and experiences of political exiles: 'Historians generally dislike lost causes. They seek to explain what happened rather than what might have been, and have consequently neglected the story of political emigrations.'<sup>29</sup> Yet, maintained Williams, the émigrés' story is an important one, not only because of its intrinsic merit as a political phenomenon worth studying, but also because of the effect that the exiles have had both in their place of refuge and in their homeland when they have been able to return. He cited the exile experience that shaped the political careers of Charles II, Louis XVIII, Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky. The 'experience of political frustration in a foreign land' (as Williams termed it) has a number of features which are common to all such exile movements. First is the feeling of loss and loneliness, the nostalgia for sights, sounds, smells and tastes of home. Once abroad the culture and customs of the homeland are preserved with especial fervour and diligence. Second is the sense of impermanence. Rarely is the decision to move abroad, or remain abroad, thought to be anything more than temporary. This was particularly the case of the Polish political emigration of the 1940s. The political aims of the Poles were similar to so many of their predecessors. They wanted to remain in existence (endure, hold out — *przetrwać*) as an opposition and a thorn in the side of the communist regime, as well as being a constant reminder to the consciences of their

<sup>28</sup> This surfaced most strongly in the affair of the 'recalcitrants' among members of the Polish forces. See K. Sword, "'Their future will not be bright": British Responses to the Problem of the Polish "Recalcitrants"', 1946–1949', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 21, 1986, pp. 367–90.

<sup>29</sup> R. Williams, 'European Political Migrations: A Lost Subject', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 12, 1970, pp. 140–8.

former allies. They aimed to maintain the legal continuity of Polish democratic government and its traditions in exile. Relying on the support of the exiled Polish masses, they would represent the voice of Free Poland. They wanted to defy — by their continued refusal to recognize them — the international agreements contracted 'over their heads' without the participation of the legal Polish authorities. Certainly in the early days many Poles viewed their sojourn in the West as a temporary one. The title of a contemporary pamphlet, *Na Przystanku*, captures the sense that they were 'at a staging post', 'at a temporary halt' on the journey back to Poland.<sup>30</sup> Many awaited the further conflict between East and West that they viewed as inevitable. This confrontation with the dark forces of communism, which looked more and more likely as the Cold War set in, would, they believed, restore the position of the exiled Polish authorities to their former status as allies. In the meantime the émigrés aimed to preserve independent political thought, maintain and develop Polish culture and husband the manpower potential of a Polish liberation army.<sup>31</sup>

Third in Williams' canon is the economic deprivation and loss of status that exiles are often forced to endure. Language problems and lack of qualifications and skills have often forced exiles into menial occupations. The reluctance to adapt, to acknowledge that the exile is anything more than temporary, often accentuates this. Stories of the professional 'declassment' of Poles in the postwar years (senior army officers cleaning silverware in Claridges, former lawyers engaged in factory work) have achieved the status of legend within the community.

Fourth, there was the statelessness which meant that thousands of Poles who refused to take British citizenship remained aliens. Many refused as a matter of principle to renounce their Polish citizenship, yet at the same time refused to have anything to do with the agencies (consular or otherwise) of the communist state. They were subject to

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30 Z. Nowakowski, *Na przystanku. List do nieznanego przyjaciela płynącego do Anglii*, London, 1946.

31 In September 1947 the journal *Lwów and Wilno* published a questionnaire asking Poles in Britain whether they anticipated a war breaking out between the USA and the USSR. Of the respondents, 96 per cent said they did and half of these thought it would break out by 1949 at the latest. (Quoted in A. Albert, *Najnowsza historia Polski, 1918–1980*, London, 1989, p. 613.) A. Hutnikiewicz makes the interesting point that the desire to see Poland extricated from the Soviet stranglehold was being felt and expressed at a time when many of the former colonial states in Africa and Asia were achieving independence. But despite the similarities of their independence struggle, these colonial independence movements did not meet with the sympathy and support of the Polish exiles, who felt that such movements sapped the strength and diverted the attention of their Western allies (notably, of course, Britain and France). A. Hutnikiewicz, 'Historyczne i Ideowe Przesłanki Emigracji Polskiej po r. 1945'. This paper was read as an introduction to a symposium on Polish émigré literature organized by the Torun branch of the Union of Polish Writers, autumn 1981.



police supervision in the early days and, if they wished to travel abroad, were compelled to use International Travel Documents.

Fifth, maintains Williams, exile has generally meant cultural conflict — the choice between a ghettoized existence amid fellow exiles, or escape and possible immersion in a sea of foreigners. Both trends can be detected in the case of the Poles, although the formation of a vital organizational life helped to ease adjustment to life in Britain. The end of so many émigré movements, wrote Williams, has been that defeat bred despair and, '[w]ith the passing of time, émigré unity dissolved under the pressure of old issues, abrasive personalities, and new movements.' In the Polish case, given the presence in exile of political parties from the interwar period, with their baggage of memories, prejudices, and scores to be settled, the potential for division and conflict was considerable.

Despite the political merry-go-round of the war years, however, which had seen émigré governments lose component parties at each major turn, when the war ended and the Allies withdrew recognition from the 'London' Polish Government, it would be fair to say that it was supported by the overwhelming majority of Poles in the West (and probably also by Poles in the homeland). With diplomatic recognition withdrawn by its former allies and no immediate prospect of reasserting control over its territory, the Polish political elite proceeded within a short period of time to disintegrate into a number of squabbling factions. The resulting disunity undermined its credibility not only in the eyes of those it sought to influence — in corridors of power in Washington, London and Paris — but also in the eyes of its immediate constituency, the émigré masses which had looked to it for leadership and inspiration. Almost the only party to benefit from its discreditable display was the puppet regime in Warsaw.

The death of President Raczkiewicz (in June 1947) signalled the end of the emigracja's fragile political unity. Raczkiewicz had nominated a successor to his office as was his right under the April 1935 Constitution. The named successor was August Zaleski, a well-known political figure who had served as Foreign Minister both before the war and for a time in the wartime government of General Sikorski. But the succession was controversial and immediately provoked rifts. By agreement with the exiled political parties and homeland opinion, veteran socialist Tomasz Arciszewski had been agreed as successor as early as 1944. It was evident that Raczkiewicz had changed his nomination just prior to his death, but the change had never been made public and there were suspicions that pressure had been exerted on him by members of right-wing political groupings. An important consideration was that the change in nomination had not been agreed, as custom required, with the government of the day (headed in fact by Arciszewski). So the choice of Zaleski and his sudden elevation to the

Presidency came as a shock and was regarded in some quarters as something of a 'coup' by the political Right.

The next two years were marked by a growing division between the political parties and the presidential camp. Matters were complicated by the return (from Poland) of Stanisław Mikołajczyk who had made his escape in the boot of the American ambassador's car. His earlier decision to return to Poland and participate in the communist-dominated Provisional Government had made him *persona non grata* in many circles, though he retained considerable support among Poles in America.<sup>32</sup> By 1949 none of the major political parties then in exile were represented in the émigré government. However, submitting to pressure from public opinion (including that from the homeland), the presidential camp in June 1949 revived the wartime National Council — a kind of parliament in exile — in order to satisfy the need for 'democratic representation'. By way of answer the political parties created in December 1949 a Political Council (*Rada Polityczna*) as an alternative focus of political organization and authority to the shell government. A further political centre (*Polski Narodowy Komitet Demokratyczny*) formed around the 'outcast' Mikołajczyk. And so, by the end of the decade, there were no less than three centres of émigré political authority, each claiming to be the legitimate representative of Polish views and the nation's interests. The rivalry between the three camps grew bitter, exacerbated by the possibility — as the Cold War intensified — of each achieving serious political influence in the international arena.

The need for unity became apparent when the re-creation of the Polish armed forces was mooted as a possibility at the time of the Korean War. (The Americans were interested and General Anders attended a conference on the subject in Paris.) It was essential that free Poland should speak with one voice and so, in 1952, General Kazimierz Sosnkowski was invited to return to Britain from Canada and attempt to reconcile the rival factions.<sup>33</sup> Sosnkowski's talks with the London factions lasted over a year and eventually resulted in a compromise being struck between the presidential camp and the parties (with the exception of Mikołajczyk and Popiel who remained 'outcasts' by popular vote). The so-called Act of Unity (*Akt Zjednoczenia*) was agreed and signed by the parties, but never came into effect. A condition of the agreement was that Zaleski would resign from the Presidency in favour of Sosnkowski. When he refused to step down, Sosnkowski returned to Canada (in March 1954) and the split in the emigracja widened. By his actions Zaleski had provoked a crisis in the emigracja and forfeited the

<sup>32</sup> S. Mikołajczyk, *The Pattern of Soviet Domination*, London, 1948.

<sup>33</sup> Kazimierz Sosnkowski (1884–69) was an influential figure, like Sikorski a collaborator of Józef Piłsudski during the First World War in organizing the Polish legions, and like Sikorski he had held political office in independent Poland as well as following a military career.



loyalty and respect of many Poles. General Anders wrote to him stating that, in the light of what had passed, he could no longer continue to regard him as the supreme symbol of state authority.

The dangers of such rivalry became apparent when the 'Berg affair' came to light. In an attempt to curry favour with the Americans, and to acquire much-needed financial support for its activities, the Political Council had agreed with US intelligence that it would organize courses (on intelligence-gathering and sabotage) for Polish agents in the southern German town of Berg (near Munich). In exchange the Political Council was to receive funds from Washington. But the operation was a disaster. Of forty-seven agents trained at Berg and sent to Poland, fourteen fell into the hands of the Polish security forces (UB) and it was clear that some had been operating in conjunction with the communists. The operations raised \$1 million for the Political Council and helped to establish it financially, but the political fall-out was heavy.<sup>34</sup>

The political disarray had serious effects among the ranks of the exiles. When the *Polish Daily* carried out a plebiscite (in early 1955) on the issue of a unified political leadership under General Sosnkowski, the majority of the 33,000 replies had been in favour.<sup>35</sup> With the legitimacy of the exile government seriously undermined, many Poles subsequently turned their backs on émigré politics. The degree of disillusionment is illustrated by figures of contributions to the National Treasury, which dropped markedly.<sup>36</sup> By 1954 the Treasury had some sixty-four separate fund-raising committees in forty-one countries. In its initial phase it had met with great success and contributions flowed in. In 1950, £18,199 was collected; £22,000 in 1951; £30,000 in 1952 and £37,000 in 1953 — of which about a quarter came from Poles in Britain. But as a result of the presidential crisis, the flow of contributions began to dry up. In 1954 the total dropped to £21,459 and by 1959 this had fallen to £16,500. Contributions from British sources fell by more than half to £4506 in 1954 and to £1400 by 1959.<sup>37</sup> A further indication of the disillusionment of Polish émigrés with their politicians came in November 1954, when the shell government of Stanisław Mackiewicz organized elections to the National Council. There

<sup>34</sup> 'Sprawa Bergu', *Zeszyty Historyczne*, no. 79, Paris, 1987, pp. 3–87.

<sup>35</sup> S. Patterson, 'Polish London', p. 340fn.

<sup>36</sup> The National Treasury (*Skarb Narodowy*) came into existence by presidential decree on 14 October 1949. It was a body created to raise funds among the émigré masses for the continuing activities of the government in exile and its administration. As the wartime funds of the overnment in exile began to run down, there was little to support its continuing activities, which, apart from the costs of running offices and paying staff in London, also involved supporting the remaining diplomatic outposts (Vatican, Lebanon, Spain, Ireland) in states which continued to extend diplomatic recognition to the exile government.

<sup>37</sup> S. Patterson, 'Polish London', p. 340fn.

was huge indifference, with only 4500 people taking part out of a possible 80,000 voters.<sup>38</sup>

Most of the Polish political parties were continuing traditions inherited from the interwar period.<sup>39</sup> They had regrouped in postwar Britain and attempted to recruit new members and develop their influence among exiled Poles in Britain and abroad. During the initial postwar years — in the period certainly to the 1947 elections — some contact with homeland branches of the parties was possible. After 1948 this became more difficult, although most parties attempted to smuggle money and literature into Poland (avoiding the censor) during ensuing decades. Probably the two most successful parties in terms of numbers and organizational development were the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the National Party (*Stronnictwo Narodowe*). The PPS was particularly strongly supported throughout the country. It organized lectures and courses and printed brochures, pamphlets and so on by the thousand. It had good links both with the Labour Party and with the trade union movement in Britain. This was significant in view of the image which has grown up of the Polish community as an essentially conservative body. Importantly it also had a dominant position within the Polish Union of Workers and Craftsmen in Exile (*Związek Rzemieślników i Robotników Polskich*), which by 1951 had some 7250 members in Britain organized in ninety local groups, and two years later had over 11,000 members.<sup>40</sup> The union was one of a number of ethnic trade unions which came into existence in the postwar period. The other major body was the Union of Merchants and Industrialists (*Związek Kupców i Przemysłowców Polskich*) which in 1950 gave its imprimatur to the *Informator Handlowy*, a trade guide to Polish businesses in Britain which ran to 104 pages.<sup>41</sup>

38 A. Albert, *Najnowsza historia Polski*, p. 699.

39 The political movement called NiD — Independence and Democracy — came into existence outside Poland in the late 1940s. It was formed by a younger generation of intellectuals, dissatisfied with the old political labels and divisions. It gained popularity through its criticism of the undemocratic practices of the émigré government and demands for greater financial openness. It developed a certain influence as something of a 'think-tank' and spread its views by means of a journal, *Trybuna*. At the beginning of 1995, however, the NiD group was wound up as a political party. B. Sulik and B. Czajkowski, 'Orientacje i nastroje polityczne wśród studentów PUCu', in *Narodziny i Działalność Polish University College (1947–1953)* (proceedings of a symposium, Warsaw, 9–11 September 1992), pp. 150–7.

40 B. Sulik and B. Czajkowski, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, Paris, 1961, pp. 431–3.

41 The guide is not comprehensive, since although the compilers visited over 200 firms in the London area, they could not repeat the exercise in the provinces. Hence, although Polish businesses in Leeds, Nottingham, Glasgow and other provincial towns are listed, no doubt many would have been missed. A copy of the Guide, and that for 1963, is held in the Grabowski Archive, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London.



At the beginning of the period 1947–55, most Poles were still in uniform and were camp- or hostel-dwellers.<sup>42</sup> By the mid-1950s the majority had found civilian employment and were increasingly moving to civilian accommodation in towns and cities. At first renting rooms, they increasingly sought to purchase property — both as an investment and as an escape from the constraints of renting. Although they found conditions difficult from the point of view of language and customs, many Poles prospered. As one observer wrote, although not wealthy, they were not poor in the sense that one would describe the poverty of pre-war eastern Poland.<sup>43</sup> Many were directed into hard physical work such as coal-mining and brick-making. While physically demanding, it was relatively well-paid work and since the majority of men had no families to support, they could afford to send parcels to family members in Poland and still save a little money. They had free medical care and their children were educated at British schools. As early as 1949 the writer Wacław Zbyszewski observed that the Polish emigration in Britain was ‘changing from being political to one which is clearly economically-motivated’. And, he continued, ‘part of our emigration is well aware that it will not return to Poland’.<sup>44</sup>

Thousands of Poles, eager to remain independent, or perhaps unwilling to face the hostility of British trade unions, set up their own businesses such as garages, delicatessens, shoe-making or clock and watch repairs. A number of Polish-owned businesses sprang up which were more than ready to employ Polish workers. These included the numerous, mostly London-based ‘parcel firms’ which conveyed much-needed foodstuffs, medicines and clothing to relatives in Poland. Even in British factories and workshops Polish work-gangs were often formed. Here communication was not a problem — except for the unwary English interloper. Naturally few Poles at this time progressed to the ‘office’ — to white-collar employment — since they lacked both the necessary linguistic ability and familiarity with British methods.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Impressions of camp life at this time are given by W.A. Zbyszewski in his article “‘Syberia obozowa’ w Anglii”, *Kultura* (Paris), 9/35 (1950), pp. 82–91. See also J. Kowalska, *Pogranicze*, Paris, 1980.

<sup>43</sup> Ferdinand Zweig, writing in 1954, confirmed the relatively advantageous position of the Polish worker and maintained that some 22,000 parcels a month were being sent to Poland at that time. F. Zweig, ‘Robotnik polskii w Anglii’, *Kultura* (Paris), 3/77 (1954), p. 103.

<sup>44</sup> W.A. Zbyszewski, ‘Bilans emigracja w Anglii’, *Kultura* (Paris), 4/21 (1949), p. 201. However Juliusz Mieroszewski took issue with the implication that if someone was earning a wage and prospering, then he/she forfeited the right to be counted as a political émigré. If this were true, he wrote, then we would have to conclude that the political emigracja in Britain numbered no more than three people. (He had in mind three senior officers granted pensions by the British Government in 1945.) The remaining 150,000 Poles settled in Britain had worked since the very beginning. ‘List z wyspy’, *Kultura* (Paris), 6/56 (1952), p. 96.

<sup>45</sup> S. Patterson, *Immigrants in Industry*, Oxford, 1968, p. 88.



With the removal of employment restrictions, many Poles in heavy manual or 'dirty' jobs opted for lighter or more rewarding work, often on the basis of the Polish 'bush telegraph'.

Indeed, a process of inter-regional migration was quickly set in motion. As they were released into civilian employment, the Poles were inevitably drawn to areas where the prospect for accommodation and jobs was most promising. As early as 1951 almost a quarter of all Poles living in Britain — some 33,000 out of a total of 140,000 — were living in Greater London, where they settled initially in cheaper areas of the capital such as Earl's Court, Brixton, Lewisham and Clapham. (So crowded did west London become with Poles that bus-conductors facetiously referred to Kensington's Cromwell Road as the 'Polish Corridor'.) In Manchester, Bradford, Leicester and other major centres of settlement the pattern was the same. Not all towns and cities were welcoming, however. When the northern area of the Polish Ex-Combatants' Association (SPK) came to decide where to site its headquarters, three cities were taken into consideration — Sheffield, Leeds and Bradford:

Sheffield attracted most attention, but from the early spring of 1947 it became clear that we had to delete Sheffield from our plans since the attitude of the local authorities was worse than unfriendly. When an SPK representative asked about the possibility of creating a Polish Club, he was given to understand that the SPK should not count on any help from the local authorities and indeed that a licence for such a club would not be issued.<sup>46</sup>

So Bradford was chosen as the SPK administrative centre for the region and has remained a lively centre of Polish life to the present day.

In demographic terms the Polish community had begun to consolidate by the early 1950s. The large-scale return movement to Poland had largely finished by 1949. Only sporadic individual returns were noted after that date. Nevertheless, over 105,000 Polish troops had taken the decision to go home, and this was a serious blow to the hopes of the émigré authorities to preserve the mass character of the emigration. Further smaller outflows had taken place to Argentina, Canada and other traditional centres of Polish settlement. Entry to the United States was restricted until June 1950 when a special Bill was passed by Congress enabling 20,000 former Polish combatants to seek residence there.<sup>47</sup> The newcomers who arrived in place of those

<sup>46</sup> This quotation is from a ten-page document entitled 'Polskie Uchodźstwo Wojenne w Północnej Anglii'. It is unsigned and undated but was printed some time after 1983 by the Federation of Poles in Bradford. Copy in possession of the author.

<sup>47</sup> The signing of this Bill was reported in the *Polish Daily (Dziennik Polski)* on 6 June 1950. According to its provisions some 18,000 Polish soldiers (the number to include families) could enter the United States in the period to 1 July 1951. However, excluded from this measure were those considered to be 'permanently settled' in the United Kingdom (i.e. those who had accepted British citizenship).

departing included several thousand military families and dependants from East Africa and the Middle East and some 14,000 Polish DPs (including females) who were recruited to work in British industry. The latter were directed to work in the North and Midlands. The arrival of Polish females went some way to correcting the gender imbalance, but it still left a heavy surplus of males. It has been estimated that women constituted a mere 15–20 per cent of the Polish population — that is, there were some four or five males for every female.<sup>48</sup> This meant that while Polish women were much sought after as brides, there was a high incidence of mixed marriages. (Some 6000 Polish–Scottish marriages are reported to have taken place in the 1940s.)

Other arrivals from Poland were infrequent but they did occur, sometimes in quite dramatic circumstances. Among the many stories of refugees from communism which caught the imagination of the British public was that of the twenty-three-year-old third officer of a Polish ship who had jumped overboard in the Channel in January 1952. He was picked up six hours later by a passing Dover–Dunkirk ferry — alive, despite the winter temperatures — having drifted four miles. Two months later, on the day that Stalin's obituary appeared in *The Times* newspaper, a MiG-15 jet fighter landed at Rønne airfield on the Danish island of Bornholm. The Polish pilot asked for asylum as a political refugee. It was later announced that he had been granted refugee status, although he subsequently took up residence in the United States. Other arrivals requesting asylum included the captain of the liner *Batory* (June 1953) and seven seamen from the merchant ship *Puszczyk* who had tied up their fellow crewmen and put ashore at Whitley (September 1954). Also, amid the many ship-jumpers and defecting members of trade missions came, in August 1954, the distinguished composer Andrzej Panufnik.<sup>49</sup>

The period marked an early flourishing of Polish organizational life. The most significant body to be formed was the Polish Ex-Combatants' Association (SPK) — a voluntary self-help association for the demobilized troops. Created in 1947, within a short space of time the SPK had extended its membership throughout Britain and overseas. By 1953 it had 14,600 members in 197 local branches, although these figures were to fall as Poles moved out of hostels and residential centres and inevitably associational ties began to loosen.<sup>50</sup> Other organizations which sprang up at this time linked the former members of particular

<sup>48</sup> Zbyszewski, 'Bilans emigracja w Anglii', p. 199.

<sup>49</sup> See *The Times*, (London), 29 January 1952, 6 March 1953, 24 June 1953, 24 September 1954 and 13 August 1954. A dramatic case occurred in July 1954 when a Polish stowaway aboard the freighter *Jarosław Dąbrowski* was rescued after Polish organizations had prevented the ship from sailing and intervened with the Home Office, sympathetic MPs and the Prime Minister (Churchill). K. Głuchowski, 'Habeas Corpus', *Dziennik Polski*, 15 November 1994.

<sup>50</sup> In 1959, for example, the membership figure was 7000 and the number of branches 112. S. Patterson, 'Polish London', p. 321.



military units, or those from the same town or region in Poland, or those from the same professional background. In this way an extensive and complex matrix of organizational ties developed which linked members of the ethnic community and reinforced, through periodic meetings, face-to-face contacts.

By the early 1950s the idea of maintaining the Polish emigration in being as a cohesive mass movement, the concept of preserving a 'nation in exile', was largely a thing of the past. Opportunities created by the growing British economy had lured Poles away from their sheltered camps and hostels, in some cases dispersing them to locations remote from centres of Polish community life. Marriage to non-Polish partners provided a route into British society for many, and rendered the emotional and cultural 'shelter' of the ethnic community unnecessary. Many Poles, including those from professional backgrounds who were 'declassed', turned to participate in organized community life both as a refuge from the strange and unfamiliar ways of the host community and as a relief from the often dull, repetitive occupations into which fate had cast them.

The British Government attempted to extend the benefits of higher education to Poles who were had ability but could not find a place at a British university. In 1947 the Polish University College was founded. It provided an invaluable higher education in a narrow range of subjects. Poles were not encouraged to study humanities but were directed into fields which would better qualify them for employment, such as engineering, chemistry and economics. The College had 980 students enrolled during the 1948–9 academic year. It was reasoned that even if the students subsequently returned to Poland, they would take with them their new skills plus, hopefully, a reservoir of goodwill toward the country which had trained them. However, while much was being done to facilitate the Poles' move into civilian life in Britain, there were concerns from the Polish side about the rapid anglicization of the younger generation. The schools which the Polish authorities had run during the war years in the expectation of return to their homeland were soon being closed down. Most Polish children born in the 1940s started at English schools. While this better prepared them for the domestic labour market, it posed a considerable threat to the retention of Polish language and culture. Hence, from the early 1950s, the Poles began spontaneously to develop their own cultural defence mechanisms. The first Polish Saturday schools were formed in the years 1948–9, to ensure that the younger generation retained a knowledge of their culture — the language and literature of Poland, its history and geography. Some were started by parents in their own living-rooms. As they grew in size most were sponsored by local groups such as the Ex-Combatants' Association branch or the Parish and were able to use the services of (pre-war) career teachers. The number grew impressively in the early



1950s (see table), leading to the re-creation of the *Polska Macierz Szkolna* in 1954.

Year	Schools	Children	Teachers
1950	10	250	20
1951	35	700	60
1952	70	1700	90
1953	80	200	140

By 1960 there were some 150 Polish schools functioning in Britain, attended by some 5000 children. However, this was less than a third of the 16,000 children estimated to have been born to Polish parents in Britain since 1944.<sup>51</sup>

*From the Polish ‘Thaw’ to Martial Law, 1956–81*

The next period in this brief history of the Polish political emigracja in Britain begins in 1956 and lasts some two and a half decades. Although other divisions could be made, the years 1956 and 1981 mark natural watersheds. In both years there were political events of the first magnitude occurring in Poland which directly affected the status and perceptions of the émigré diaspora with its base and centre in Great Britain. Both events too provoked a significant population outflow from Poland, thus adding to the émigré ranks.

Following worker unrest in Poznań in June 1956, the return to power of Władysław Gomułka was accompanied by a political ‘thaw’ in Poland. One of Gomułka’s first steps had been to free the imprisoned Polish primate, Cardinal Wyszyński. Subsequently it became known that Gomułka had negotiated the repatriation of ethnic Poles (many deported from Polish territory during the 1940s) from the Soviet Union. Some Polish commentators in the West were optimistic that a major turning point had been reached. Speculation was rife as to the future course of events. Even if Gomułka succeeded only in restoring national sovereignty — in establishing a Titoist state free from Moscow control — the role of the Polish emigracja would have undergone a change: its new aim would not then be independence and sovereignty, but the rebuilding of freedom and a democratic system in the new Poland.<sup>52</sup>

There were of course those who desperately wanted to believe that real change was on its way. The more optimistic elements (especially those with close family in Poland) thought that the events in Poland signalled a real change of direction; they hoped for closer contacts and greater influence on the course of events. But suspicion and disbelief

51 B. Sulik and B. Czaykowski, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, p. 532.  
52 J. Mieroszewski, ‘Comments on a Speech of Władysław Gomułka at the VII Plenum, 21.X.1956’, *Kultura*, 1956, Dokumenty (Zeszyt II).

reigned among more sceptical members of the emigracja. Many felt that the liberalization process would be short-lived, some that it was a communist manoeuvre to induce the emigracja to drop its guard. The slogan 'all or nothing' was bruited, signalling the continuing irreconcilability of the hardline émigrés and their unwillingness to compromise. Their demand continued to be for both sovereignty and democracy to be restored.<sup>53</sup>

But in the short term restrictions on movement to and from Poland were relaxed. It became easier to visit the homeland once again, or to invite relatives over, after the long years of Stalinist repression. The freedom to leave Poland led to a major exodus in the late 1950s. Official figures speak for themselves:<sup>54</sup>

Year	No. of émigrés from Poland
1955	2,000
1956	33,000
1957	148,500
1958	132,900
1959	29,800
1960	241,000

Only a relatively small percentage of this outflow settled in Britain, although Home Office figures show that numbers of Polish visitors to the United Kingdom shot up dramatically in relative terms. While only 200 arrived in 1954, 377 in 1955 and 1701 in 1956, there were 10,868 Poles entering the country as tourists or casual visitors in 1957. (Although the figure eased in the following year to 6691.) The influx meant a drain on the finances of the community as Poles dipped into their savings to bring family members over.<sup>55</sup>

While most of these visitors came on a temporary basis some were to stay permanently. The opening up of Polish frontiers meant the first addition of any size to the émigré community since the 1940s. So for the emigracja there were important demographic, as well as ideological implications to the changes in Poland. The initial period saw many marriages take place, as unattached males from the émigré ranks sought partners from Poland or were introduced to young women invited over by their families. Also, as Sheila Patterson observed: '[a]n increasing number of matrimonial enquiries began to appear in the *Polish Daily* inserted by women from Poland, where there is an excess of women

<sup>53</sup> A. Albert, *Najnowsza historia Polski*, p. 771.

<sup>54</sup> These statistics are taken from A. Pilch and M. Zgorniak, 'Emigracja po drugiej wojnie światowej', in A. Pilch (ed.), *Emigracja z ziem polskich w czasach nowożytnych i najnowszych, XVII—XX w.*, Warsaw, 1984.

<sup>55</sup> Patterson, 'Polish London', p. 338fn.



over men.’<sup>56</sup> Marriage to a British citizen meant of course that they gained the right to remain permanently in the United Kingdom. The number of Polish citizens granted permission to settle in Britain was small by comparison with the inflow of immigrants from the New Commonwealth at this time, but it increased from 450 in 1956 to 1010 in 1957 and 1050 in 1958. Three-quarters of this number were females, the majority settling by reason of marriage. But the influx continued into the 1960s. In many cases there was a large age difference between the partners — of fifteen, eighteen or even twenty years. Their arrival resulted in a small baby boom over the next decade and the classes of the Polish Saturday schools reached their fullest capacity during the 1960s and 1970s.

There were also some reunions of marriage partners who had not seen each other since the war years (this meant for some a gap of sixteen years). Fathers were introduced to their sons and daughters, young men and women whom they had last seen as babies. Not all of these reunions were successful and there are cases on record of wives who returned to Poland, unable to relate to husbands whom they found fundamentally changed by their wartime experiences, exile years and age. From the more successful unions, however, fresh offspring often resulted. These were to grow up with elder brothers or sisters who were more uncles and aunts to them.

In the period 1947–55 there had been effectively a double obstacle to contacts with the homeland. Not only had the paranoia of the Stalinist regimes in east-central Europe led to the drawing down of the Iron Curtain, but the *emigracja* had erected its own barriers. The *émigré* community shunned all official contact with the communist regime and its representatives, as though in fear of ‘contamination’. There were no dealings with Warsaw diplomats or official visitors from Poland on political, cultural or economic matters. Meanwhile offices and functions, unions and associations were duplicated between the Warsaw regime and the London ‘pretenders’. Not only were there two governments with their respective political apparatus, but there were two Writers’ Unions, two Scouting movements, two Combatants’ Associations and so on.

Few people from among the massed ranks of the *emigracja* had travelled to Poland in the years 1947–55 other than tardy repatriates. So the lifting of the barriers from the Warsaw side was a great test of the discipline and morale of the *emigracja* and its singleness of purpose. (It might also be seen as a statement of strength and confidence from the

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 338fn. There had been a considerable depletion of the male population of Poland owing to war losses. The Polish General Census of February 1946 indicated that there were 118 women to every 100 men. By 1956, when more reliable statistics were available, the ratio was 116:100. *Rocznik Statystyczny*, 1956, Warsaw. This disparity has continued throughout the postwar decades although it has been more pronounced in the towns and cities than in the countryside.



Warsaw regime which now felt that it had consolidated its hold on the country.) While returning visitors were tacitly recognizing the durability of the communist regime, acknowledging that state socialism was no longer 'temporary' and was destined to remain for the foreseeable future, few were yet prepared to accept that it was legitimate or represented the views of the Polish people. A small number of exiles took the opportunity to return permanently. Their hopes for a speedy end to communist rule having been thwarted, they convinced themselves that communism was developing a human face. This group included the well-known writer and former Prime Minister of the exile government Stanisław Mackiewicz.<sup>57</sup> The return of Mackiewicz came as all the more of a shock in that he had formerly been such a vehement critic of the Warsaw regime and of the loss of the Polish eastern territories to the USSR.

The possibility of return was a great temptation to the ranks of exiles — particularly to those ordinary people who had left immediate family (wives and children) behind. If they decided to visit the homeland they were forced to compromise their principles and their status as political exiles and refugees. In the first place they needed a passport. Since the IRO Travel Documents issued to bona fide refugees were not recognized for travel to one's country of origin, this meant applying for British citizenship.<sup>58</sup> It was a major decision for any Pole and involved much soul-searching. It represented at best a weakening, compromising the firm ideological front of the émigrés with regard to the Warsaw communists. At worst, such a step was an acknowledgement of defeat, of the durability of communist rule in Poland and the permanence of exile. Nevertheless, despite pressure against the step from émigré political authorities, political parties and social organizations, by 1961 some 23,000 Poles — 16 per cent of the emigrants living in Britain — had taken British citizenship.<sup>59</sup> Pressure against return visits also continued to be exerted. Opposition was particularly strong from organizations such as the Ex-Combatants' Association (SPK) and the Polish scouting movement (ZHP).<sup>60</sup>

The conflicts which arose are illustrated in a letter to the journal *Kultura* sent by a Polish guide instructor in March 1962. The author pointed out that two long-serving guide leaders had recently been removed from their posts on the grounds that they were no longer 'worthy of the confidence placed in them' since they had travelled to

<sup>57</sup> Stanisław Mackiewicz (1806–1966) was a prolific author. He was the publisher and editor of the pre-war journal *Słowo Wileńskie*. He was a leading member of the conservative camp and a staunch defender of Poland's right to her pre-war eastern territories. In the immediate postwar years he edited a journal entitled *Lwów i Wilno*.

<sup>58</sup> Patterson, 'Polish London', p. 342fn.

<sup>59</sup> A. Albert, *Najnowsza historia Polski*, p. 833.

<sup>60</sup> B. Sulik and B. Czaykowski, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, p. 505fn.

Poland. The Polish scouting authorities had passed a directive banning scout and guide instructors from visiting Poland even to see families. Arguing against the blindness of the 'irreconcilables', who so 'loved' the Poland of their dreams that they had learned to spread hatred of the Poland which actually existed, she appealed as a mother to her readers that they should not tolerate a situation in which their children were cut off from the homeland in the name of the politics of independence:

No Polish story book, no Saturday school can act as a substitute for seeing Poland at first hand. And it really is a secondary issue what kind of flag flies there and whether the eagle has a crown or not. Children can only grow to love the Poland which exists, or not love her at all. A hypothetical Poland is only of interest to our 'immortals', who have long since lost touch with reality. Let them by all means not travel to Poland — no one there will miss them.<sup>61</sup>

Many of the older exiles indeed feared that they had lost touch with the realities of life in contemporary Poland. Writer Stefan Kisielewski played on this unease in 1962 when, writing in *Kultura* he pointed out that, contrary to some views, the emigrant did not lose the right to possession of his homeland, but after a certain time did lose the capacity to *understand* it. He appealed to compatriots abroad to come and see Poland for themselves. This was a great temptation for those frustrated by more than fifteen years of exile and fearful that if they waited much longer it would be impossible for them to readjust.<sup>62</sup>

For the émigré masses away from the public spotlight, and particularly for those with children, in so far as they could afford it, travel to Poland increasingly became the norm. Indeed if the truth be told, large numbers (perhaps the majority) of the Polish population were becoming indifferent to émigré politics and already by this early stage placed little weight on the pronouncements of the émigré leaders. One account describes this process as the 'depoliticization' of the emigracja — *proces odpolitycznienia*.<sup>63</sup> Increasing numbers of people had ceased to take an interest in 'independence activities' and were devoting their energies instead to their working lives and raising their standard of living, to family life and to community activities: scouting, Saturday schools, sports activities, parish life, and so on.

The international credibility of the émigré political authorities had long since waned and when a new Pope, John XXIII, was elected in 1958, the Holy See did not renew the accreditation of the exile Government's ambassador, Kazimierz Papée, thus effectively withdrawing recognition from the 'London' Polish Government.<sup>64</sup>

61 *Kultura* (Paris), 5/175 (1962), pp. 158–9.

62 S. Kisielewski, 'Mój testament', *Kultura* (Paris), 6/167 (1962), pp. 100–5.

63 Sulik and Czaykowski, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, p. 503.

64 A. Albert, *Najnowsza historia Polski*, p. 773.



The eagerness to see the homeland with their own eyes after such a long period of exile induced more and more Poles to visit.<sup>65</sup> Many family reunions were to take place in the years immediately following. Many of the older émigrés, if they were ever really political exiles, ceased to be so, since, as Juliusz Mieroszewski wrote, they were people who:

... have not collaborated, neither have they taken passports from the communist authorities — but they have become entirely reconciled to 'holiday Poland'. If they contribute to émigré goals — they do it anonymously; they don't take part in political demonstrations and do not add their names to appeals and protests ... they leave behind them any kind of link with centres and organizations of political activity, avoiding carefully any kind of gestures which might threaten them with the refusal of any entry visa from the PRL authorities. They have become less and less émigrés and are becoming more and more transformed into Poles living abroad.<sup>66</sup>

Another correspondent to *Kultura* commented on the material level of Poles in Britain, observing that 600 private cars turned up from all over Britain for the 1956 'Miss Polonia' ball. It seemed certain, he wrote, that these people were not interested in the seventeen years of unending national mourning, nor in Councils of Three, Executives or other elements of the struggle being waged by the émigré political establishment. The term 'internal emigration', he continued,

... embraces people who have refused to participate in the officially delimited life of 'People's Poland'. We abroad have also a problem of the 'internal emigration'. What is worse, we can calmly claim that the 'internal emigration' comprises 80 per cent of the émigré community. These people, it is true, have not left Great Britain, however they have left the Emigracja.<sup>67</sup>

However, this tendency towards indifference should not be exaggerated. When Khrushchev and Bulganin headed an official Soviet delegation to London in April 1956, the National Federation of Poles and the *Polish Daily* organized a protest demonstration from Kensington to Westminster in which an estimated 20,000 people took part. Some 55,000 people also signed a petition of protest.<sup>68</sup> But the Khrushchev visit was a 'concrete' issue of national interest where a point could be made both to the Soviets and to their British hosts. There was less willingness to take part in a 'domestic' émigré political process where the leadership was divided. In June 1962 only 14,000 people, 20 per

65 The largest Polish travel bureau in London, Fregata, alone handled travel arrangements for 1500 people in the period between March 1959 and March 1960. It is estimated that some 3000 Poles from Great Britain visited Poland during 1960. Sulik and Czaykowski, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, p. 505.

66 J. Mieroszewski, 'Rozważania emigracyjne', *Kultura* (Paris), 10/165 (1961), p. 100.

67 'Kronika angielska', *Kultura* (Paris), 7/105 (1956), p. 131.

68 *Dziennik Polski*, 1–23 April 1956.



cent of those entitled to, voted to elect delegates to a General Assembly of Poles in Great Britain.<sup>69</sup>

The first visit to Poland was an eye-opener for people who had hitherto relied on their information about the homeland from an émigré press and publications which portrayed the plight of the Moscow-dominated homeland in the blackest of colours. Despite the poor material conditions, the greyness and the circumscribed freedoms, returnees were able to see some positive aspects. They saw, for example, that Polish culture was alive and flourishing, that urgent steps had been taken to eradicate illiteracy and to replace the cultural and technical intelligentsia which had been decimated by the wartime policies of the occupying powers. The ability of Poles to see the homeland with their own eyes meant a more restricted role for the émigré press. Émigré authors were no longer able to write in such wholly negative — often uninformed terms — about the homeland. The émigré establishment's control of information flow was further weakened by the arrival of publications from the homeland. Henceforth periodicals from Poland ceased to be 'forbidden fruit' and, whereas the more overtly political publications were rarely read, the lighter end of the publishing range (women's magazines, sporting papers and so on) would be read with increasing frequency in Polish households.

Increased contacts with Poland meant business opportunities for the travel agencies and those firms sending parcels to Poland. Apart from the numerous Polish delicatessens and Polish language publishers which were established during this period — and served other East European communities as well as the Poles — the parcels firms were the nearest thing to an ethnic economic 'niche' that one could find at this time. There were, for example, no chains of Polish restaurants to match those of the Indians, Italians or Chinese, no Polish stranglehold on cafes, ice-cream parlours or laundries. The many tens of thousands of parcels sent annually were of considerable economic aid for individuals, families and for the homeland generally.

It was Mieroszewski who observed the perverse tendency of the communist authorities to generate opposition and periodically expel 'dissident' elements, thus adding to the ranks of the *emigracja*.<sup>70</sup> The Polish 'thaw' of October 1956 was soon put into reverse and in March 1958 a number of people were induced to leave the country for exile abroad. Many of these were highly educated people of left-wing views, who had followed the Party line at an earlier stage (including literary critic Jan Kott and writer Aleksander Wat) but few of this group found their way to Britain. A more serious outflow from Poland occurred ten

<sup>69</sup> A. Albert, *Najnowsza historia Polski*, p. 834.

<sup>70</sup> 'The regime which regards the *emigracja* as its main opponent ... Nevertheless time unwittingly produces still more successive waves of emigrants — reserves from the homeland.' Quoted in Hutnikiewicz, 'Historyczne i ideowe przesłanki *Emigracji Polskiej*', p. 12.

years later when the Party watchdogs carried out a purge against the cultural intelligentsia. The number of Polish citizens leaving the country during the period 1968–72 has been estimated at between fifteen and twenty thousand. There were distinct anti-Semitic undertones to the Party campaign, but precisely what proportion of this outflow was Jewish is not clear. It is known that only some 3800 went to Israel.<sup>71</sup> Again, though, a relatively small number of this new exile wave found their way to Britain. Some in any case turned away from Polishness altogether.

The new exiles included writers of some repute such as Henryk Grynberg and Sławomir Mrożek (who took up residence in the US and Mexico respectively), but also almost the whole of Warsaw University's philosophical, historical and sociological elite — most of whom were of Marxist orientation. Scholars such as philosopher Leszek Kołakowski and economist Włodzimierz Brus — both of whom were subsequently recruited to posts at Oxford University — were accused by Party dogmatists of being 'revisionists'. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman and his wife Janina, who left Warsaw under similar circumstances, initially spent three months in Israel before settling in Britain.<sup>72</sup> Again, as in 1958, only a tiny proportion of the outflow came to Britain. Most made their way to the United States, Canada, Israel or western European states such as Sweden. There was a paradox in that this new emigration was sometimes at least as uncompromising with regard to the Warsaw authorities as the old post-1945 émigrés. Their firm stance resulted from the fact that they had firsthand knowledge of the situation at home; they knew what they were talking and writing about. They had experienced the day-to-day realities of life under communist rule in Poland. Most exiles by contrast had only second-hand knowledge, derived from written materials, visitors' reports or relatives' letters.

A further point worthy of mention is that the 1968 exiles were, in many cases, Marxists who had criticized the regime on ideological grounds. Being of radical left-wing persuasion they were unlikely to find a common language with the more conservative (and, with time, increasingly less intellectual) emigracja of 1945 vintage. Nevertheless attempts were made to bring the newer exiles into some kind of relationship with the more established compatriots so that assessment of the situation in Poland could be pooled. A number of this 'cohort' of political exiles found employment in the media — they were prominent in the BBC Polish service over the next two decades. Others gravitated to the literary and analytical circles based at Maisons-Lafittes, Paris (*Kultura*) or in Munich (Radio Free Europe). A number of new

<sup>71</sup> Statistics from J. Ilicki, 'Młodsze pokolenie żydowskiej emigracji "pomarcowej" 1968 roku po piętnastu latach pobytu w Szwecji', in A. Iwańska (ed.), *Fale emigracji polskiej*, London, 1990, p. 31.

<sup>72</sup> Janina Bauman's memoir of these years has been published under the title *A Dream of Belonging. My Years in Postwar Poland*, London, 1988.



publishing ventures resulted. The Smolar brothers settled in London and Paris, but it was in London that they established Aneks — the political and philosophical quarterly and publishing house — which over the next two decades was to produce some of the liveliest and most thoughtful writing in philosophy, history and politics.<sup>73</sup>

In December 1970, following unrest on the Baltic coast and the shooting of workers, the émigré authorities formed the Committee for Aid to Poles (*Komitet Pomocy Rodakom*) as a charity aiming to collect money for the families of victims. The money raised was sent to the Polish episcopate for distribution. However, efforts of this kind, although they demonstrated a continuing interest in events ‘at home’, were dwarfed by the kind of financial contribution which could be made by the larger and more prosperous community of American Poles.<sup>74</sup>

The inflow of newcomers from Poland continued at a low but steady rate during ensuing decades. Most were marrying into the existing community, who were increasingly members of the second generation. The arrival of the newcomers was not always warmly received; indeed their reception could be ambivalent, since while their arrival meant fresh blood for the community, there was suspicion both on political grounds (most had been educated under communist rule) and on moral grounds (cases of fortune-hunters came to light). Some seeking to escape the repressive political and economic climate in Poland adopted quite desperate measures to be able to remain.

By the late 1960s and 1970s, members of the ‘second’ generation born outside Poland in the 1940s and 1950s were reaching maturity, marrying and beginning to start families of their own. It was a landmark decade in many respects. The demographic changes which were taking place are symbolized in the deaths of underground leader General Bór-Komorowski and politician Stanisław Mikołajczyk in 1966; these deaths were followed by those of General Sosnkowski in 1969, General Anders in 1970 and President Zaleski in March 1972 — at the age of eighty-nine years old! The death of Zaleski at last removed the barrier to a unified political leadership, but a quarter of a century had passed since the controversial succession, and too many people had been alienated for the political leadership to count for much within the community. The impression had grown that this was an exclusive club of elderly men playing political games. The impression was reinforced when Zaleski was succeeded by Stanisław Ostrowski — himself eighty years old.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>73</sup> P. Smoleński, ‘Z Aneksem bezpieczniej’, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Warsaw, 17 December 1993. An abbreviated version of this article appeared in the *London Tydzień Polski*, 19 February 1994. The article included tributes from Professors Leszek Kołakowski and Marcin Król and from Adam Michnik.

<sup>74</sup> A. Albert, *Najnowsza historia Polski*, p. 995.

<sup>75</sup> A. Albert, *Najnowsza historia Polski*, p. 996. Zaleski died on 7 April 1972.



The associational structure of the Polish community continued to flourish. In 1966 Millenium celebrations were held to mark a thousand years of the Polish state. Military leaders were invited from exile and a large meeting took place in the hall of Westminster Cathedral. Later some 40,000 Poles gathered to commemorate the event in London's White City stadium.

Polish property ownership had been growing apace, both in terms of residential housing and also in terms of community property — clubs and parish halls. But in the 1960s a feeling had been gaining ground that some planning needed to be done to create a major centre of Polish cultural life. In the mid-1960s construction work began in the West London borough of Hammersmith on POSK, the Polish Social and Cultural Centre. Although the project was dogged by financial difficulties in the early years, the foundation stone was blessed in March 1971 (by Bishop Rubin). The plan was not without its critics, but once completed proved to be a magnet for Poles from the London area and beyond.

By the late 1960s the Polish community was well integrated and was generally accepted by the host society. By this point, writes Sheila Patterson, the British no longer looked on the Poles as 'potential scabs, fascists or Casanovas'.<sup>76</sup> Another writer, though, maintains that ambivalence still existed at both 'official' and 'grassroots' levels into the 1960s and 1970s. She cites, by way of example, the decision of the Wilson Government to withdraw funding from the Polish Library and the efforts of British Catholic priests to draw Poles away from their ethnic parishes.<sup>77</sup> However, a case occurred in 1968 which shocked both Poles and their British friends. It involved a case of quite blatant discrimination against Michael Szuba, the eighteen-year-old son of a Polish father and an English mother who was refused entry to the RAF officer training school at Cranwell. Although British-born and having above-average grades in his examinations, the young man was obviously regarded as a security risk because of his Polish family connections. The matter was made worse by the fact that his mother's three brothers had all flown with the RAF. Angry comment in the contemporary press can be illustrated by the *Daily Express*, which questioned how many years' residence would be needed before Mr Szuba enjoyed the same rights as other British citizens. A special enquiry was set up under the then under-secretary for RAF affairs, Merlyn Rees, but the ban remained.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> S. Patterson, 'The Poles: An Exile Community in Britain', in J.L. Watson (ed.), *Between Two Cultures. Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, Oxford, 1977, p. 240.

<sup>77</sup> B. Wojciechowska-Kibble, 'Generational Differences in Ethnic Consciousness. A Study Based on Post Second World War Polish Roman Catholic Immigrants in Britain, with Special Reference to Coventry and London', MA thesis, University of Warwick, 1976.

<sup>78</sup> E. and Z. Boniecki, *Polskie spotkania na Wyspach Brytyjskich*, Warsaw, 1972, p. 222. See also *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Yorkshire Post*, 28 September 1968.

A further, perhaps more momentous episode in which the Poles were forced to struggle against a recalcitrant British bureaucracy was the affair of the Katyn memorial. The Polish community, headed by the Ex-Combatants' Association, had been attempting for years to have a memorial erected in London to the victims of the 1940 Katyn massacre — where 14,000 Polish officers were murdered in cold blood by Stalin's NKVD. Since the Foreign Office refused to acknowledge that it was a Soviet crime, the date on the monument became politically sensitive (1941 would indicate that the Germans had been responsible, as the Soviets claimed). After several rebuffs, the Borough of Ealing eventually agreed to the erection of a monument in Gunnersbury Cemetery, and this was unveiled on 18 September 1976, despite the protests of the Soviet and Polish embassies.

The eyes of the emigracja, and of the Polish diaspora generally, focused on the homeland in October 1978, with the election of the first Polish Pope and his dramatic return to Poland in the following year. This provided the trigger for a whole series of events which culminated in the emergence of the independent trade union Solidarity headed by Lech Wałęsa. Poland suddenly became 'fashionable' with the world's news media. She had forced the first cracks in the edifice of communist hegemony in east-central Europe. Young people from Polish backgrounds began to feel a new sense of pride in their roots. Some of the more politically aware younger generation — a committed but admittedly small minority — became involved in activities aimed at supporting opposition in Poland, particularly the Committee for Workers' Defence (KOR).<sup>79</sup>

### *The Political Struggle Comes To An End, 1982–91*

On 13 December 1981 the communist authorities in Poland imposed martial law in an effort to re-establish control of the country. The clampdown on the Solidarity trade union reversed the growing movement towards democracy and political pluralism in Poland. This in turn led to a further significant wave of 'political emigration' from Poland — the largest in the postwar period. Not only did thousands of Poles, who by accident or design found themselves abroad, decide to apply for political asylum in the country of temporary residence, but in the course of the 1980s tens of thousands left the country — some 'illegally', albeit with the tacit acquiescence of the Warsaw authorities, to settle abroad. Estimates of the number who fled vary. However one source, quoting police records, has suggested that in the period 1981–8 222,000 people emigrated officially and 533,000 became 'illegal emigrants' by extending their stay abroad after expiry of their visas.

<sup>79</sup> A. Ostoja-Ostaszewski *et al.*, *Dissidents in Poland 1976–77*, (produced by the Association of Polish Students and Graduates in Exile), London, 1977.



The same author calculates that in the period 1980–9 some 1,050,000 Poles emigrated. (This includes 60,000 in 1980 and 220,000 in 1989.)<sup>80</sup>

This outflow was a serious loss, both in social and economic terms. Not only did the number of emigrants in 1988 and 1989 exceed the figures for natural increase of the Polish population in the two years concerned, but emigration also contributed to a decline in the total population of working age. This decreased by some 500,000 (2 per cent) between 1985 and 1989. Throughout the 1980s the proportion of highly skilled and educated people among those emigrating continued to increase. In 1988, for example, some 44 per cent of those leaving had completed secondary school, compared with 31 per cent among the Polish population as a whole.<sup>81</sup>

However, the number of post-Solidarity asylum-seekers remaining in Britain during the 1980s was small, amounting to only a few thousand in the course of the decade. In the autumn of 1982 the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees stated that there were some 300,000 Poles remaining in western Europe 'illegally', together with those seeking asylum. In the United Kingdom a mere 400 were seeking asylum at this stage. However a further 4000 were in the UK apparently having had their leave to remain extended.<sup>82</sup> In February 1983 a group of British MPs sent a letter to the Home Office requesting that Poles currently in the United Kingdom be accorded refugee status. The petition concerned those who had remained in the UK after the declaration of martial law in Poland — their number being put at (only) 1200.<sup>83</sup> It is not clear what accounts for the discrepancy in these figures.

Kurcz and Podkański have suggested that during the period 1983–9 some 6305 Poles were given leave to remain in the UK. According to their calculations almost 57 per cent of this group were women and 78 per cent of the total were of productive age (between the ages of eighteen and sixty years old).<sup>84</sup> The absence of a greater inflow to the UK can be attributed in large measure to the cautious — even restrictive — policy of the British Government towards temporary visitors from Poland. Entry to Britain was also expensive. In the course of the late 1980s, the British Government's entry policy became even more restrictive, with Polish citizens being asked to pay some 350,000 zloties — the equivalent of £20 — in applying for visas to Britain, a sum

80 M. Okólski, 'Poland', in S. Ardittis (ed.), *The Politics of East-West Migration*, London, 1994, p. 51. But note also that some 200,000 people returned to Poland in the course of the 1980s.

81 Ibid.

82 *Kultura* (Paris), 11/422 (1982), p. 129.

83 *Kultura* (Paris), 4/427 (1983), p. 171.

84 Z. Kurcz and W. Podkański, 'Emigracja z Polski po 1980 roku', p. 72, tables 11 and 12. These tables are based on Polish official statistics. The figures for Britain (6305) doubtless include many people who were emigrating and settling in the normal course of events (e.g. due to marriage) as contrasted with asylum-seekers. This distinction is not made clear in the figures but should be borne in mind.

which constituted a large proportion of the average Polish monthly salary and which was not returned to the applicant if the visa request was turned down.<sup>85</sup> Those who remained in Britain after 1981 were not made to feel welcome by the British authorities, who were reluctant to give them the right of permanent residence. As a result their status remained uncertain for several years. Cases of suicide were given publicity and a number decided to emigrate further afield.

This may have been a lost opportunity for Britain. The mass exodus which took place from Polish soil in the 1980s is widely recognized as having included the migration of many highly-educated and skilled professionals, such as doctors, engineers and scientists. But the small population which settled in Britain was even more highly qualified than the average for the emigrant group. Statistics suggest that the Poles who settled in this country between 1983–8 included a disproportionately high number (more than 50 per cent) of students and professional workers, and fewer workers and technicians compared with the groups of Poles settling elsewhere in the West.<sup>86</sup>

Nevertheless, it may be argued that the restrictive entry policies applied by the British Government to Poles were not altogether unjustified during this period. At the beginning of the decade the Jaruzelski regime had taken the astonishing decision to 'export' common criminals. It was enough for a felon to declare his (or her) willingness to travel abroad and for the Passport Office to confirm with the police that an individual had a criminal record, and a passport was made available. So there arose the absurd situation whereby 'for the ordinary, honest citizen foreign travel was practically impossible, while a huge number of criminals became citizens of Europe'.<sup>87</sup> The communist regime's encouragement to criminal elements to emigrate was an attempt to rid the country of unwanted elements. But it was also a step aimed at compromising the liberal immigration policies of Western states and blackening by association the name of 'Solidarity' exiles seeking sanctuary in the West.<sup>88</sup> There is no evidence of how many — if

<sup>85</sup> The story of one Pole who evaded such measures was heard in south-east London during 1993. As a merchant seaman employed on a factory trawler he had jumped ship in the Falkland Islands and, having arrived in this rather unorthodox fashion on British soil, he claimed asylum. (Conversation with G. Słonecka, Putney, 9 May 1993)

<sup>86</sup> Kurcz and Podkański, 'Emigracja z Polski po 1980 roku', p. 80. table 16. The statistics represent the backgrounds of 2166 Poles — approximate a third of the total number — settling in Britain during the period. Figures refer to 'illegal' emigration, i.e. to those who left Poland as tourists or to study, but did not seek permission to emigrate.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>88</sup> Fidel Castro made a similar attempt to embarrass the US and compromise its immigration policy by allowing political dissidents, criminal elements, mental patients and disaffected Cubans generally to leave the country in large numbers during 1980. In the course of four months during the so-called 'Mariel' boatlift, some 125,000 Cubans arrived in Florida, overwhelming the state's capacity to



any — of this group managed to enter Britain, but in view of the small numbers admitted it cannot have been many.

In Britain the events of December 1981 had an invigorating effect upon the Polish exile camp. There was probably a greater level of community and organizational mobilization for political goals than at any time since the 1950s. This involved the exile political authorities and combatants' associations in fund-raising and campaigning. The Council for Aid to Refugees (*Rada Pomocy Uchodźcom*) operated under the aegis of the exile government. Organizations came into existence to give material and moral support, and publicity, to the banned Solidarity trade union. Groups such as the 'Polish Solidarity Campaign', 'Solidarity with Solidarity' and the 'Solidarity Working Group' came into being which involved both refugees from Poland, younger British-born Poles and British members of non-Polish descent.<sup>89</sup> Activities involved helping stranded Solidarity supporters, arranging lectures and press briefings, raising funds (for example for printing equipment badly-needed in Poland) and arranging demonstrations.

The Polish Students' Appeal Fund was set up by a group of academics with East European connections and interests to make some provision for the hundred or so Polish students stranded in Britain by the martial law. The Appeal was aimed at finding the students places at British universities and polytechnics where they could complete their studies.<sup>90</sup> These martial-law reponse groups, though, were *ad hoc* organizations called into existence to meet specific needs. They folded when the changing political situation in Poland rendered them redundant.

The most publicized event of the 'internal history' of the emigracja in the early part of the decade was the visit of Pope John Paul II to Britain in May 1982. The decision for the visit to go ahead was delayed because of the Falklands War. During his stay in Britain, however, the Pope paid a historic visit to Canterbury and on Sunday 30 May attended a special meeting at London's Crystal Palace stadium with members of the Polish community. It was a remarkable occasion, with 25,000 people present in the stadium as early as seven o'clock in the morning. The *Polish Daily* reported that hundreds of coaches had come from all over Britain, including twenty-nine from Ealing alone! The Pope's speech indicated his awareness of the unique origins of the Polish emigracja in

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process the newcomers. S. Weintraub and G.A. Fauriol, 'Migration and Economic Intervention', in K.A. Hamilton (ed.), *Migration and the New Europe*, Washington, DC, 1994, p. 87.

89 The founding of the Polish Solidarity Campaign in fact predated the declaration of martial law by over a year, having come into existence on 26 August 1980. One of its aims was to co-ordinate the views of the British Left towards Poland — in particular to refocus the thinking of the Labour Party and the Trade Unions on their contacts with the 'official' (i.e. communist approved) trade unions there.

90 S. Gomułka, 'Studenci polscy kontynuują naukę w Wielkiej Brytanii', *Kultura* (Paris), 3/426 (1983), pp. 110–12.

Britain: '... those who found themselves here as the result of wartime events were not emigrants. They were Poland torn from its own borders, from its own battlefields...'.<sup>91</sup> The assurance from the Holy Father that they were still regarded as part of Poland, that after some four decades' absence from the homeland their contribution was still remembered and valued, received a warm response from those present.

For the communist regime in Warsaw the existence of a political protest movement abroad — a strong voice of opposition and dissent that was beyond their control — was a constant irritant. But the communists had been confident in their ability to consolidate their hold on power and outlast their exiled opponents. They had counted on time to do their work for them. If the *emigracja* could not be silenced, the passing away of the first generation would surely signal an end to the resolution and hostility of the exiles. In the event though, it was the *emigracja* that outlasted communism. The year 1989 marked not only the fiftieth anniversary of the outbreak of World War II — the beginning of a conflict which had dispersed Poles around the world — it turned out also to be the Poles' *annus mirabilis*: the year in which communist rule was toppled. The ending of Party rule in Poland mirrored the changes taking place in many other Soviet satellites in east-central Europe, as one by one Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Romania and Bulgaria slipped from communist control.

The presidential elections which took place in Poland in the autumn of 1990 and resulted in victory for the former Solidarity leader, Lech Wałęsa, confirmed the transformation that was taking place. Indeed, changes had occurred with such rapidity that even the participants appeared at times surprised by the speed of events. The political leaders of the Polish community in Britain were certainly caught out. Over a period of decades their political goals had come increasingly to resemble the second coming awaited by medieval millenarian cults — with dwindling expectancy and enthusiasm. Until the mid-1980s few would have claimed to expect such radical change in Poland in their lifetime.

The dramatic political events immediately put the relationship between *Kraj* (homeland) and *Emigracja* (the émigré community) on a completely new footing. As, gradually, members of the new post-communist regime came to the West for consultations with Western leaders, they made a point of acknowledging the role played by the émigrés. The new premier, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, paid a visit to London in February 1990, and made a point of meeting with members of the Polish community in Britain.<sup>92</sup> As a result of this visit, and Mazowiecki's appeal for help from the *emigracja* in the economic reconstruction of Poland, the Federation of Poles in Great Britain

<sup>91</sup> *Dziennik Polski*, 31 May 1982.

<sup>92</sup> *The Times*, 12 February 1990, p. 12.



launched an appeal (the so-called 'Mazowiecki Fund') which by March 1991 had collected over £500,000 from Poles in Britain.<sup>93</sup>

At this stage Poles abroad looked at unfolding events in Poland — particularly the process of political and economic transition — with a mixture of pride, excitement, disbelief and, at times, frustration. Many were asking whether they as individuals, or the communities of which they formed a part, could not do more to help. The new situation also forced the émigré community into a process of self-evaluation and assessment. This took place both at personal and at institutional level. There was a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment on the part of the exiles, who had completed their 'soldier's service' to their country. For the survivors of the 1939–45 war there was a keen sense of having fulfilled their role. Combatants were soon being invited back to Poland to take part in marches and be fêted in commemorative reunions.<sup>94</sup>

However, with the introduction of democratic government and a popularly-elected presidency in Poland, there was no longer any justification for a government and president in exile. They had served their purpose but their day had gone. In December 1991, a matter of weeks after Lech Wałęsa's election victory and swearing in as President of Poland, the exiled former President, Ryszard Kaczorowski, embarked on a historic and emotional journey to Warsaw to formally hand over his office to his successor. He took with him the various insignia of presidential office that had remained in Britain for over half a century following the arrival of the Polish Government from France in 1940.

I have come to nascent Poland in order to hand over to the freely elected President, Lech Wałęsa, the state insignia of the Second Republic. Through many long years since the tragic year 1939 these insignia were both the proof of our legality and the symbol of our faith in the rebuilding of our exhausted homeland. The legal Polish authorities beyond the frontiers of the homeland ceased to be recognized in the diplomatic chancelleries of foreign governments,

<sup>93</sup> Subsequently, voices were raised questioning the wisdom of such charitable action and suggesting that the best form of aid was investment. The fate of the Mazowiecki Fund was one of the factors leading to a disillusionment with the new democratized Poland. The £500,000 collected 'sank without trace in the state budget'. Meanwhile the Polish Exchequer lost a sum several times this amount (some suggested a hundred times) through failing to collect import levies on imported alcohol — a scandal that implicated government ministers. *Tydzien Polski*, 29 June 1991.

<sup>94</sup> In August 1992 the World Congress of Polish Combatants was held in Warsaw and Częstochowa under the patronage of President Wałęsa. Old soldiers marched in procession through the Polish capital to the grave of the Unknown Soldier. In their ranks were those who had fought in the September 1939 campaign in Poland, in the Italian campaign with the Polish Second Corps, in North-West Europe with the Polish Armoured Division, with the Polish Air Force and Navy in the West and in the Polish underground Home Army. This was a symbolic and emotive moment. Those who survived were able to pay tribute to fallen comrades and to meet comrades who had survived, but from whom they had been separated for decades.

but they were accredited in Polish hearts both in the homeland and abroad. [...] In handing over these insignia, together with the banner of the Republic which once flew over this Castle, I detect in them the golden key to a better future for this, our beloved native land.<sup>95</sup>

The ceremony which took place in Warsaw's Royal Castle on 22 December was richly symbolic, and in handing over the insignia the émigré political camp acknowledged both the legitimacy of the new authorities to govern and also their legacy as natural heirs to the traditions of the interwar Second Republic. Henceforth, indeed, reference was made to the Polish Third Republic — the communist period being ignored as one in which the country had been denied full sovereignty.

Prior to his departure from London, Kaczorowski had secured an agreement that the Government in Exile and its associated structures (including the National Treasury, which raised funds among Poles abroad to fund the exile government's activities) would also be wound up as soon as possible. A Liquidation Committee was established which worked through 1991 and completed its work by the end of the year. At a meeting on 27 January 1992, with a representative of President Wałęsa's present, the Committee reported that the exile government's publishing programme had ceased, that the government archives had been transferred to the General Sikorski Archive in London and that financial documents had been passed to the President's Chancery for checking. In keeping with an agreement arrived at with the new president, the financial reserves of the Government in Exile, including those from the sale of its property in Eaton Place, were not to be returned to Poland, but instead would be used to provide help for Polish educational, cultural and scientific ventures both in Poland and abroad.<sup>96</sup> At the institutional level, the Polish community was forced to devise a means by which community activities could continue to be focused and co-ordinated. The winding-up of the exile government led to the promotion of the Federation of Poles in Great Britain as a 'new' umbrella body for social and community organizations.

The year 1989 effectively marked the end of the emigracja's role as a stronghold of political opposition abroad to the regime in Poland. In its origins the postwar political emigracja was dominated by soldiers of the Polish Army. These provided the backbone of the community and dominated its organizational structure in early decades. Although its cultural and historical significance has been considered to be inferior to that of the Great Emigration, history will nevertheless record that it had made an indisputably positive contribution to the Polish cause.

<sup>95</sup> Extract from President Kaczorowski's speech delivered at the Royal Castle, Warsaw, on 22 December 1990, translated from *Rzeczpospolita Polska* (London), no. 12(435)/1(436), December 1990/January 1991, p. 1.

<sup>96</sup> E. Szczepanik, 'Zakończenie działalności Rządu RP na Uchodźstwie', *Dziennik Polski*, 13 March 1991.



It was dominated by people who, shaped by the struggle for independence and the interwar years of national rebirth and rebuilding, were immensely patriotic. They were strongly attached to the ideals of the Second Republic and intent on maintaining its traditions.<sup>97</sup> They looked back with nostalgia to the short period of independence, stifled so abruptly in 1939, and in the difficult conditions of exile attempted to perpetuate the existence of a state in exile and a government in waiting. They worked to ensure the continued development of independent Polish culture, Christian values and an historical tradition undistorted by communist dogma.

The achievements of the *emigracja* were numerous. It developed a considerable organizational infrastructure through which to cater for the needs and interests of its members. It promoted Polish history and culture by the publication of thousands of books, pamphlets, articles and by lectures. In latter years, it is true, the propaganda contribution of the 'London camp' had paled beside the efforts of the *Institut Literacki* (Paris) and Radio Free Europe (Munich), while the material support and political influence had been outstripped by that of the much larger Polish community in the United States.

Although it did not produce any entrepreneurial businessmen to match the Forte dynasty, its members achieved within a generation a considerable degree of prosperity, not only in individual terms, but in its many community properties — clubs, churches, presbyteries, retirement homes and so on. Indeed, Zbigniew Kruszewski has written that history will judge the main role of the postwar *emigracja* to have been the unceasing group and individual actions to convey material help (food, clothing, medicines, remittances) to the community and to relatives in Poland, over a period of some four decades which were for many years devoid of hope. This, he suggests, was the largest and most significant contribution to the Polish cause.<sup>98</sup>

A different form of aid to the homeland, but one which created a more lasting enterprise, resulted in the formation in 1981 of the Medical Aid for Poland Fund. It was set up in answer to an appeal from the Solidarity leader, Lech Wałęsa. Brought into being under the aegis

<sup>97</sup> A symbol of continuity and fidelity to the traditions of the Second Republic was the *émigrés'* determined effort to maintain the crown on the head of the White Eagle, emblem of the Polish state. The crown had been removed by the communists after 1945. Of course Poland had ceased to be a monarchy in the late 18th century, and the communists argued that they were simply restoring the historic Piast emblem (uncrowned eagle). However, for the *émigrés*, maintaining the eagle's crown became a point of honour as it symbolized defiance of the communist regime and its attempts to rewrite history.

<sup>98</sup> Z. Kruszewski, 'Emigracja żołnierska (z perspektywy czterdziestolecia)', in A. Iwańska (ed.), *Fale Emigracji Polskiej*, London, 1990, pp. 19–28. Note though that Kruszewski seems to be referring to the wider *emigracja* — including those who, like himself, migrated onwards from Britain. In which case it is extremely difficult to distinguish their contribution from that of other, 'non-political' Poles in, for example, Canada or the US.

of the Union of Polish Doctors Abroad it was supported by people who were aware of conditions in Poland and alarmed at the effect the deteriorating economic situation was having on the Polish health service. In the period to June 1994 the organization had sent 319 lorryloads (over 9000 tons) of medicines, medical equipment, clothing and so on to Poland, which were ferried over and distributed through the diocesan offices of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. Some medical equipment went directly to hospitals and research centres. This is one organization which is interesting in a sociological sense for the way it has welded together different factions of the community — particularly the second generation and newcomers from Poland. It has continued its operations and now (1994) has a network of helpers and fundraisers throughout Britain and produces its own journal.<sup>99</sup>

The emigracja also raised a generation of young people in Polish and Catholic values, albeit educated in Great Britain. These young people were in many respects the emigracja's (and Poland's) best advertisement, as they went out into different branches of working life to make a contribution to the society of which they were now a part.

On the debit side, as Kruszewski again argues, although the human potential of the emigracja was huge and dynamic, it was largely wasted. If individuals did achieve anything, then it was almost always by breaking away from the influence of 'Polish London'.

However, there is much in Kruszewski's criticism that from the beginning the Polish emigracja was not prepared for its fate. The aim of the emigracja — of a 'state in exile' — was only realistic for as long as the Second World War lasted. After the end of the war the leadership did not come up with any alternatives, except *przetrwanie*. This was a policy which contributed to a sense of turning in on oneself, to (in Kruszewski's words) 'ghetto-like stagnation' and a growing sense of demoralization among those who were active in the Polish cause. When one adds to this the political factionalism, the impenetrably dense organizational networks, and the financial irregularities, there was a sense in which the leadership failed its followers and the cause it promoted.

It was also a policy with a limited time-scale since it could not effectively be carried forward by the second generation. History shows that the impediments to the transfer of such a political ethos across the generations are usually too formidable. Such a message can only retain its effective force and its capacity to impel group members where there

<sup>99</sup> It is significant that the Medical Aid for Poland Fund adopted an organizational form which included British patrons (headed by Baroness Cox). This marked a break with the 'ghettoized' form that most Polish organizations had assumed hitherto, recruiting only Polish members. MAPF also used its members' extensive contacts within the British Health Service to secure items of equipment that were redundant and on the point of being scrapped. *Tydzień Polski*, 4 June 1994. I am grateful to Joanna Ledóchowska and Richard Sliwa for supplying me with additional information on MAPF.



is (a) some continuing experience of hardship stemming from the original displacement and dispossession, and (b) a distinct and identifiable 'oppressor' perceived as a target in the pursuit of revenge or redress. (The cases of the Palestinians and the Armenians come to mind.) Neither was strictly true in the Poles' case; they prospered in their new countries of settlement, as eventually did their children, without undue persecution or discrimination from their hosts. On the other hand, the Soviet regime which had prompted their exile was a remote and unapproachable enemy.

Through its self-imposed isolation, argues Kruszewski, the political emigration largely ruled out the possibility of transforming itself into a pressure group in the society in which it settled. As a consequence, all action of a political, collective kind tended to be *ad hoc*, improvised, an adaptation to the realities of life abroad. As we shall see, the Polish community leadership did eventually turn its energies to lobbying in the domestic political arena — with some success.

### 3

## Changed Directions and Orientations

The political changes in Poland brought a number of issues sharply into focus for members of the Polish community in Britain. They changed the émigrés' perception of the homeland and their relationship to it. In the immediate aftermath of the events of 1989 (the first 'semi-free' elections) and especially following the handing over of the presidential insignia in December 1990, there was a general feeling of euphoria. Freedom and independence had been regained. The political stance of the emigracja had been vindicated; the sacrifices made by the exiles had been rewarded. The role of the émigrés, their deeds and achievements, were being fêted in Poland. Streets in Polish cities were being renamed after General Anders and the heroes of Cassino and Tobruk. The literary achievements of the emigracja came in for serious study and open discussion. The surviving combatants returned to take part in marches and special commemorative events.

Some six months after his election to the presidency, Lech Wałęsa made a state visit to Britain. The British press made much of this former shipyard electrician and Solidarity union leader staying as the guest of the Queen in Windsor Castle. During his stay (4–6 May 1991) the President visited the Sikorski Institute and Museum in South Kensington, and the Polish community had its own meeting with the new President in the Polish Embassy. Wałęsa assured his Polish audience that '[y]ou, the whole of the Emigracja which fought for Independence, have fulfilled your mission with the greatest dignity. The Nation will never forget you for that.' He also appealed to the Polish diaspora, that each of them, irrespective of where they lived, should 'as far as his or her situation allowed, remember that their roots were by the Vistula'. Finally, he reminded them that he was also 'President of Poles abroad' — 'you have also voted for me'.<sup>1</sup>

The change of regime in Warsaw led to new possibilities in the relationship between the Polish Government and the diaspora communities. In the period from 1945 to 1989 there had been few official contacts between Warsaw and Polish organizations abroad, despite the creation of a special body — the *Towarzystwo POLONIA*, funded from the budget of the Foreign Affairs Ministry — to handle

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<sup>1</sup> *Dziennik Polski*, 6 May 1991.



such links, but many Poles had shunned this as a communist front organization. However, with the change of regime in 1989, there were no longer any barriers to re-establishing contacts. According to different estimates, there were between twelve and sixteen million people outside Polish frontiers who felt some tie to Polish culture and values.<sup>2</sup> The Polish Government decided that the maintenance of links between Poland and the diaspora communities was an issue of national importance which could not be left randomly to social organizations, family contacts and professional and business contacts, but must be handled through the appropriate offices of state administration. Just two examples of the kind of problem with which the Polish authorities felt they should become involved were: (i) maintaining schools teaching Polish subjects for the diaspora communities, which required the involvement of the Ministry of Education, and (ii) the problem of the elderly emigrants who retired to Poland, which would require the involvement of the Health and Social Security ministries on questions of pensions and welfare rights.<sup>3</sup>

A series of consultation meetings started at the beginning of 1990 which continued through the year. The initial encounter, between minister Aleksander Hall and leaders of the Polish Diaspora communities, took place in Toronto (26–7 February) when agreement was reached on co-operation (importantly, as equals or partners) between the Homeland and Polish organizations abroad. Follow-up meetings took place in May (London), September (Austria) and November (London) of that year. But the most significant event in re-establishing formal links between the Homeland and the Polish Diaspora took place in Rome (25–30 October 1990), where the basis of co-operation and the plans for a joint Congress in Poland were agreed.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, from the Polish government's point of view, one of the most difficult diaspora communities to deal with was going to be that in Britain, since London had been for so long the seat of exile politics. Hostility and suspicion towards Warsaw agencies had become endemic in the fabric of organized Polish life in Britain. They had learned to be suspicious of provocative steps aimed at creating divisions and eroding morale: of the various cultural and friendship societies, the sponsored holidays, the 'free gifts' of books to Polish Saturday schools run by the

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, F.W. Carter, "'For Bread and Freedom': Geographical Implications of the Polish Diaspora', paper presented at the International Conference on *The Diaspora Networks*, Nicosia/Larnaca (Cyprus), 25–8 April 1993. 'Unofficial estimates' that some fifteen million people of Polish origin live abroad are not necessarily reliable as an indication of those who 'feel' Polish or are active in Polish community life. Often it seems they are based on the inflated estimates of local organizations.

<sup>3</sup> M. Mazur, 'Polonia i polskie wychodźstwo w zadaniach instytucji państwowych', *Tydzień Polski*, 9 April 1994.

<sup>4</sup> T. Lesisz, 'Od konferencji rzymskiej do konferencji Polonii i Polaków z zagranicy w Krakowie', *Dziennik Polski*, 17 August 1992.

émigré community. There were Poles in Britain who remained distrustful of the political emissaries sent from Warsaw and noticed that many former communist party members remained in office in the civil and diplomatic service.

The selection of Tadeusz de Virion as new ambassador to London marked an important stage in the development of the relationship between British Poles and the Homeland. De Virion was a Kraków lawyer who had previously taken part in defending many Solidarity activists and therefore possessed excellent credentials in the eyes of those Polish exiles who had devoted much of their lives to opposing the communist regime. The new ambassador was to play a significant role in reconciling British Poles to the new post-communist homeland. (Indeed some described him as more Polish ambassador to the emigracja than to the Court of St James.)<sup>5</sup>

A number of thorny issues were soon being raised with the Warsaw authorities during this period. Not least was the question of the civil status of those Poles who had never taken British citizenship; they regarded themselves still as Polish citizens but had no papers to prove it. Many of this group had only their military identity papers from the war period. What were their rights with regard to voting in Polish elections?<sup>6</sup> Yet ironically, at the same time, an appeal was being made for the Home Office to speed up the process of granting British citizenship to other elderly Poles. These were people who were evidently acknowledging that after more than four decades their future lay in the United Kingdom and the 'protest gesture' of refusing to apply for a British passport could at last be abandoned.

An additional problem was that of purchasing property in Poland and the question of reclaiming property confiscated or appropriated by the communist regime. Issues of property and citizenship (and pensions entitlements) were discussed in a series of articles by the Polish Consul General which began to appear in the *Polish Daily* in late 1991 and continued over the ensuing months. Both were issues in which there was a considerable amount of interest, and on which enquiries had been reaching Polish government representatives.<sup>7</sup>

In Poland, following the 1991 general election which saw the last vestiges of the round-table compromise formula removed (the 65 per cent of seats in the Sejm reserved for the communists and their allies), the new government of Jan Olszewski passed a resolution outlining the aims and priorities of government policy towards Polish communities abroad. In this document, the following five aims were laid out:

<sup>5</sup> 'Ambasador de Virion opuszcza Londyn', *Dziennik Polski*, 16 November 1993.

<sup>6</sup> *Dziennik Polski*, 26 October 1992 and 30 November 1992.

<sup>7</sup> For example, *Dziennik Polski*, 29 October 1992 ('Ustawa o obywatelstwie polskim') on the new citizenship legislation. A series of articles entitled 'Konsul wyjaśnia' — 'The Consul clarifies' — appeared in the newspaper over the next few weeks.



1. To strengthen the social position of Polish communities in countries where they have settled.
2. To maintain Polish culture in the world by spreading knowledge of the Polish language, Polish culture and Polish national traditions.
3. To strengthen ties between Poland and the Emigration.
4. To make use of the Emigration to help transform the Polish economy.
5. To help Poles in the East (i.e. in the former Soviet Union).<sup>8</sup>

By 1993 the various tasks and responsibilities had been distributed to different ministries — co-ordinated by the Interministerial Commission for the Affairs of Poles Abroad. However, at Cabinet level the Bureau for the Affairs of the Emigration and Poles Abroad acted as a centre where information was pooled and also as an advisory body to the Prime Minister. It also helped to carry out policies resulting from Cabinet decisions.<sup>9</sup>

There was a widespread belief on the part of most diaspora Poles that their homeland had been restored to some sort of 'normality', with a democratic political system, an independent judiciary and improved civil rights for its citizens which included the right to retain one's passport and to leave and enter the country at will. Visitors commented on the changed economic situation: how once scarce goods had become freely available, but at much higher prices. Most noticed the changed attitudes of officials and shop-assistants — now far more courteous and ready to oblige. But were such changes sufficient in themselves to induce them to return?

In the first place, the elderly (and many more recent) political exiles had to re-evaluate their position and status. It presented many with a dilemma. As one émigré writer put it ruefully, 'There is only one thing worse than losing your homeland; that is, recovering it again after a gap of almost half a century.'<sup>10</sup> For decades such people had viewed themselves as political exiles, had portrayed their settlement in Britain as enforced, had taken pains to distinguish their situation as 'unwilling'

<sup>8</sup> M. Mazur, 'Polonia i polskie wychodźstwo'.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. At this time (1993) a debate was taking place in Polish political circles about whether to destroy or preserve the many files accumulated in Polish consulates on Poles and Polish organizations abroad and their attitude towards 'People's Poland'. Z. Róžański, 'Zniszczyć, czy zachować dla potomności?', *Dziennik Polski*, 26 January 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Shortly before his death, the Polish community activist Ryszard Zakrewski wrote that the 'independence emigracja' had not lost its sense of direction, but in idealizing Poland had been disappointed in its political leadership. He went on to talk of 'political disintegration' in Poland: 'It is in Poland that the ethos of Solidarity was destroyed, in Poland that there is no authority which has not been debased.' Quoted in the obituary notice by W. Moszczyński ('Wspomnienie o Ryszardzie Zakrewskim'), *Orzeł Biały*, no. 1501, June 1994, p. 55.

settlers from that of clamouring economic immigrants. Their situation mirrored that of members of the Jewish diaspora who for generations on feast days had promised each other 'next year in Jerusalem'. In fact, in 1948, with the creation of the State of Israel, it became possible to 'return'. Yet a storm of protest greeted Arthur Koestler's logical suggestion that every European Jew should either play an active part in the building of a Jewish homeland — or else give way to assimilation and stop yearning publicly for a Jerusalem for which they were not prepared to give up business interests in England, France or America.<sup>11</sup> Were the Polish exiles now to return to Poland, the free and sovereign state for which they had long campaigned?

Two who did return did so posthumously. In September 1993, the remains of General Sikorski, wartime Polish Prime Minister who had died when his Liberator aircraft crashed at Gibraltar in July 1943, were removed from their resting place in a Newark cemetery and returned to Poland. Although the Polish (communist) authorities had previously requested the repatriation of Sikorski's remains, this had been strenuously opposed by the exiles who maintained that Sikorski had wanted to be buried in a free and independent Poland. The British Government had upheld the objections of the exiles in the past, but could no longer do so. The ceremony in Warsaw in the late summer of 1993 celebrated the return of this famous son to the homeland a few weeks after the fiftieth anniversary of Sikorski's death at Gibraltar.

A further symbolic break with the past occurred with the death of Count Raczynski in London at the age of 102. Raczynski had been appointed ambassador in London in 1934 and was briefly Foreign Minister in the exile Government of General Sikorski. He had remained in exile after 1945 and had been instrumental in helping the British authorities to wind up the affairs of the wartime Polish government agencies and to ease the transition of Poles into civilian life in Britain. He had been for a time President in exile of the Republic and until his death was perhaps the most potent living symbol of the continuity and legitimacy of the exiled political authorities.<sup>12</sup>

But those still living, the survivors of the wartime settlement, had lived longer in Great Britain than in Poland. Their ties of sentiment were now here rather than there. Children and grandchildren were settled in Britain. Many had grown too accustomed to their country of adoption — its culture, ways and customs — to uproot themselves once again and start life anew, particularly in a Poland which was itself changed so radically. Many mentioned the benefits of the British health service as a strong inducement to stay (especially important for those of

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in an article by Z. Broncel, 'Marginesy emigracji', *Kultura* (Paris), 4/102 (1956), pp. 14–15.

<sup>12</sup> Count Edward Raczynski was born in Zakopane in 1889 and studied at the London School of Economics. His obituary appeared in the *The Times* on 2 August 1993.



advanced years). Others simply talked about the relative ease and comfort of life in Britain, compared with the uncertainty of what they faced in Poland, in the throes of continuing economic and political upheaval.

The realities of democratic government in Poland brought further questions. What kind of relationship was to be forged between associations and institutions maintained in exile (Combatants, Scouts, Union of Polish Writers) and the equivalent bodies in Poland which had been supported by the communists over decades? Were cultural and educational resources such as the Polish Library and the Sikorski Institute to remain in London or be conveyed to Poland? Such questions illustrated the wider problem of the identity and role of a community which had for so many decades shaped its activities by opposition to the regime in Poland.

There was doubt and uncertainty. Did the Polish community in Britain have any further role? What could the justification be for perpetuating Polish culture and identity in the British Isles? What was the future of the community to be — and importantly, had it made sufficient provision for the future by encouraging Poles of the younger generation not only to retain the identity and values of their parents, but also to contribute to social and organizational life?

In an attempt to sound out the members of the Polish community on their own future, the Polish Consul General initiated a consultation process. This was carried out through the émigré press, and also in the form of a large meeting (*Spotkanie 100*) with invited members of the Polish community, on 7 March 1992, to solicit views on new directions it might take.<sup>13</sup> Not all émigrés were enthusiastic about this step. As indicated above, there were still a number of people in the community who remained distrustful of the homeland emissaries or else were worried that Warsaw now wanted to ‘take over’ the institutions which the émigrés had built up with such effort and enterprise during the previous five decades.

The peculiar status of the exiles had encouraged in some a degree of self-delusion; maintaining a degree of institutional distance from Polish society they nevertheless developed the belief that they could in some way help the homeland adjust to freedom. Although there was some brave talk about the emigracja, with its accumulated experience, especially in business, helping the homeland, most of the older exiles were conscious of the fact that, as writer Stefania Kossowska put it, they had ‘passed their sell-by date’ and had little to offer a homeland of which they had insufficient direct knowledge.<sup>14</sup>

The younger generation had more to offer, although in their case, it has to be said, idealism was rarely a sufficient motivation. Those who

<sup>13</sup> I am grateful to Mr Janusz Kochanowski, the former Polish Consul-General, for providing me with notes and press clippings of this session.

<sup>14</sup> S. Kossowska, ‘My i Oni’, *Tydzień Polski*, 18 June 1994.

did travel to Poland went mostly in the capacity of company representatives or advisors, using their professional skills in banking, economics, accountancy, law and management. They were paid generous salaries to exploit opportunities in what was seen as one of the most promising emerging markets of east-central Europe. The idea of some mystical call to 'return' to live permanently in Poland was for many incomprehensible. As one second-generation correspondent to the *Polish Daily* put it, the younger generation had been raised in a different environment and in any case they could not 'return' to a country they had not migrated from.<sup>15</sup>

If the homeland had been restored to some sort of normality, could the Polish minority in Britain be said now to be normal? Hitherto, over more than four decades, its character had been dominated by the émigré political ethos. There had been a state apparatus preserved in exile. Poles in Britain had angrily rejected the label 'immigrant' which implied an economic or labour-seeking motivation to their settlement and bracketed them with the waves of New Commonwealth immigrants which had arrived in the United Kingdom from the 1940s onwards. In spite of the demographic changes which had taken place — the dilution of the older émigré vintage with younger arrivals and the growth of a second generation — they had held firm to the title of 'political emigrants'. This was the measure of their uniqueness and their special role. It was in a sense a form of boundary maintenance — marking them off not only from the host community but from other minority groups in Britain.

In the same way the Polish émigrés in Britain had resisted the application of the term 'Polonia'. 'Polonia' is derived from the Latin word for Poland and is often applied by Polish academics, journalist, politicians to the Polish communities abroad (hence American Polonia, French Polonia, Canadian Polonia and so on). The word 'Polonia' seemed to bracket the British branch of the Polish diaspora with those elsewhere in the West which were founded upon the free movement of labour-seeking migrants — mainly of peasants. Here again, the origins and motivations of the British Poles were different, and they resisted a classification which played down their idealistic protest role.

But how were they to see themselves now? Should they now accept the term 'British Polonia'? Whatever the changed circumstances, the term did not, some felt, do justice to their roots and the cause that had been fought for so long. Were they now merely 'Poles living abroad', 'people of Polish descent'? Should they now accept that they were purely a 'Polish ethnic group' living in Britain?

The dilemma illustrated a profound crisis of identity for the Polish community in Britain. It was a crisis which manifested itself in two key aspects. The first arose from the passing of the political protest role —

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<sup>15</sup> K. Nowakowski, 'Spotkanie 100', *Dziennik Polski*, 14 April 1992.



it was a problem of character, orientations, ethos and mobilization. What cause or rationale could replace the ideology of émigré opposition? Second was the problem arising from demographic changes — the passing of the émigré generation and the emergence of a younger generation with new needs, new aspirations and a very different experience of Polish identity to that of their parents. In adjusting to new directions and a new role the Polish community had in some way to involve these younger people and begin to make some concessions to their needs. In a word it had to start thinking more urgently about the future and the needs of the community in Britain. This was a radical switch for a community whose leadership had for so long been focused on the past and on the homeland.

British Poles realized not only that the character and needs of the community were changing irrevocably, but also that if steps were not taken soon to involve them, the achievements of the *emigracja* — its associational structure, clubs, churches, institutes, libraries — would pass from the scene with the remaining members of the generation which had created them. The process of involving the young was long overdue. Many members of the younger generation had already been driven away by the unwillingness of the older generation to concede the reins of control.<sup>16</sup> During the communist period the struggle for independence had been the struggle of those who remembered Poland and had experienced the war years; it was not a campaign which those born outside Poland could be expected to take on.

A boost to the involvement of the young — and an incentive to their ambitions — was the arrival in London of the new political leaders from Poland. By contrast with their émigré hosts, few of whom were younger than their seventies — many of the new political class in Poland arriving in senior ministerial positions were in their thirties or forties (for example A. Hall, L. Balcerowicz, W. Pawlak, A. Kwaśniewski). A further important consideration was the repeated call for the energies of the community as an ethnic group to be refocused on life and needs in Britain. The younger generation Poles were possessed of greater assurance and self-confidence with regard to the institutions of the host society. They were familiar with its ways and in many cases saw the benefits of adopting, or borrowing, its customs and practices. Unlike so many of their elders, they were not prepared to work within a ghettoized existence, but saw a role for themselves which in many senses would bridge the divide between Polish and British communities.

The concept of forming a Polish 'lobby' or pressure group, which emerged as a practical possibility in the course of 1991, grew out of several streams of thought and action. The first stream of thought concerned political 'clout' — the influence wielded by the Polish

<sup>16</sup> As an example of this gerontocratic tendency, it was pointed out to me during 1992 that the average age of the seven-man board of trustees of the Polish Cultural Foundation (PFK) was at that time eighty-two years.

community in the corridors of power. Although certain Poles had made their mark at local level as town and borough councillors, the ethnic community had a very low profile as far as national politics was concerned. There were, it is true, institutional links between the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) and the Labour Party dating from the war period. The Anglo-Polish Conservative Association, with its base at the Polish Hearth Club in Kensington, had flourished for years and linked the Polish community to influential figures in the Conservative Party. But some of the more articulate members of the Polish community voiced a degree of frustration that after so many decades of settlement in the United Kingdom, there was no 'Polish' member of parliament.<sup>17</sup> This sense of 'under-achievement' in the political sphere was heightened during the late 1980s and 1990s when several members from ethnic minority backgrounds (Boateng, Abbot, Grant, Vaz) entered the House of Commons.

We may speculate on the reasons for this relatively weak party political activity on the part of the Polish community. Poles in the United States too, despite their vastly greater numbers, have played a relatively small part in American politics. Few have run for political office. Some of the reasons which Victor Greene adduces for this hold true for the Polish community in Britain. Language was initially a handicap; the rate of naturalization was slow, most regarding themselves as sojourners rather than settlers; and they were preoccupied with private and group concerns — obtaining property, building community institutions, supporting the Church — rather than with the wider American community. Achieving prominence in the American political system, writes Greene, was simply not a major objective.<sup>18</sup>

The orientations of the British Poles as a political émigré community had also not encouraged this kind of formal participation in the political system of the host society. While the Poles were happy to cultivate British politicians and enlist them in their cause, their 'cause' had focused on wider issues than British domestic politics. As an older generation Pole expressed it to me several years ago:

<sup>17</sup> 'I hear with envy from friends in Canada how the Ukrainians there have become a political force to be reckoned with. A Ukrainian is Governor-General of Canada (representing the Queen), Ukrainians are in leading positions in several provinces, they are parliamentary deputies and occupy many positions in Canadian state life. After fifty years in Britain, and more numerous than the Ukrainians in Canada, we do not have one member of parliament of Polish descent, we have no Polish lobby, we have no-one who know how to — and wants to — write articles and letters to British periodicals that would have a chance of being printed, etc., etc.' S. Kossowska, 'My i Oni'. This theme is by no means a new one, although it gathered fresh life in the early 1990s. Some thirty years ago similar views were being expressed by Polish exiles in Britain. See E. Długoszewski (Letter to Editor), *Kultura* (Paris), 7/213–8/214 (1965).

<sup>18</sup> V. Greene, 'Poles', in *The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, 1980, p. 800.



Politics is, for the average Pole, a very different thing than it is for the average Englishman, who, if he thinks about it at all, probably equates it with the never-ending wrangle in the House of Commons. For Poles it is a much wider subject altogether — much more akin to international affairs....<sup>19</sup>

The idea of fighting for representation in the British Parliament had been anathema to most hardline émigrés, because it signalled a turning away from their original goals, an acknowledgement that the struggle for independence had failed and they must resign themselves to the permanence of life in their new country.<sup>20</sup> Symbolically and psychologically this was a step they could not take. It is true that a number of younger generation Poles had contested parliamentary seats, but this had been done independently of the structures of the émigré community.<sup>21</sup> So a sense of wanting at last to wield some political muscle was part of the impetus behind the 'lobby'.

On another level the calls for a Polish 'lobby' may be regarded as the logical consequence of the process by which a minority community, having established itself and grown more prosperous, was now feeling self-confident enough to challenge press and media images of Poland and Polish life that it regarded as distorted or tendentious. It may also be seen as in some sense a response to an increasing level of mobilization by the black immigrant communities in the course of the 1980s and the growing move towards racial equality. If members of the black and coloured minorities could take action against prejudice and stereotyping, then why should not a white minority such as the Poles?<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Quoted from K. Sword, 'Ethnic Identity and Association among Polish Emigrés in a British Town', DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 1983, p. 239.

<sup>20</sup> When Dr Jan Mokrzycki contested the by-election of Coventry in 1964 (and later in 1966), attempting to oust the sitting Labour member, Richard Crossman, on behalf of the Liberal Party, he received no help from the Polish community on an official level. Many of his Polish friends and his patients (he is a dentist by profession) helped out. But the SPK could not help — because although it was a political organization in the sense of being in protest against the Soviet domination of Poland, it chose to remain above party politics, whether Polish or British.

<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, despite the conservative orientation of the vast majority of Poles in Britain, the three 'Polish' candidates for election to Parliament known to this writer represented three different parties: W. Moszczynski (Labour), K. Nowakowski (Liberal Democrat), G. Mond (Conservative).

<sup>22</sup> As an example of the incidents which irritate Poles, the *Polish Daily* carried a short article in early 1992 entitled 'Olympic gaffe'. As part of television coverage of the Winter Olympic Games at Val d'Isère, the BBC had invited Konrad Bartelski, widely regarded as the best British skier of the postwar era, into the studio for his expert comments. Not only did the BBC presenter fail to pronounce Bartelski's name properly, but instead of apologizing said, '... in your position I would have changed my name long ago'. (Bartelski did not respond, apparently rendered speechless by the presenter's lack of tact.) The author of the article expressed contempt for the ignorance and arrogance of the presenter in suggesting that a British skiing champion, son of a Polish airman, should change his name. Why? To make things easier for the presenter? 'The incident superficially ... only confirms the typical British xenophobia, concealed beneath the light veneer of racial egalitarianism demanded by law.' If Bartelski had had a different coloured

So the 'lobby' idea was conceived both in 'defensive' terms — protecting the good name of Poles, and in an 'offensive' sense — campaigning to support the interests of the Polish community and possibly of Poland itself. The tasks were crystallized in December 1991 at a meeting of a committee which sprang up under the auspices of the Federation of Poles in Great Britain. The tasks which the committee (*Komisja Spraw Polskich*) set itself were: (i) to consult with specialists on the setting up of a pressure-group organization; (ii) to prepare a questionnaire on Polish matters for candidates at the forthcoming election; (iii) to bring pressure on the government to drop the visa requirement for Polish citizens wishing to enter Britain; (iv) to co-ordinate efforts to ensure appropriate care for elderly Poles, including collaboration with British social welfare bodies; (v) to protect Poles against 'Polonophobia'; and (vi) to encourage and support British firms wishing to invest in Poland.<sup>23</sup> It was the campaign organized around the visa issue which gained the most support.

Following the 1991 Schengen Agreement, Polish citizens were able to travel visa-free to Germany, France, Italy and the Benelux countries. Outside the European Community, Austria, Sweden and Switzerland had also dropped the requirement for visas. The British Government followed its European partners in declaring Poland to be a 'safe' country from which, henceforth, asylum seekers would not be accepted. (The Home Office was no longer prepared to issue refugee Travel Documents to émigrés of earlier years, insisting that it was now time that they decided either to apply for British or Polish passports.) But whereas the British Government had dropped visa requirements for the Czechs, Hungarians and citizens of the Baltic States — it had not done so for Poles. Evidently the British authorities regarded Polish citizens, drawn to Britain by the magnet that the established Polish community presented, as being more likely to work illegally and to find ways of prolonging their stay.

The campaign mounted by the Federation of Poles in Great Britain pointed out that such discrimination — practised against 'former wartime allies' — was unjustified. In the first place, departmental fears were exaggerated: not a lot of Poles were likely to want to come to Britain when there were more prosperous states which were nearer to Polish frontiers (notably Germany). Second, members of the Polish community who wanted to invite relatives to Britain felt that they were being dealt with harshly. Third, it was bad for business and for Britain's image abroad. Fourth, because UK citizens faced reciprocal visa requirements from the Poles, it meant that British tourists and

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skin, continued the author, there would have been a flood of protests. *Dziennik Polski*, 11 February 1992.

23 From minutes of the meeting which took place on 2 October 1991 in the Polish Cultural Centre (POSK), Hammersmith. Forty-five people were present, mostly of the second generation.



businessmen faced similar bureaucratic procedures in travelling to Poland (Warsaw was ready to drop these requirements on a *quid pro quo* basis).

In the pursuit of its aims the Federation acted as a pressure group in the way that any other pressure group such as Amnesty International might. It used techniques appropriate to the British political scene, developing contacts with the press, mounting a campaign of letters to MPs, arranging discussion meetings, distributing fact-sheets and so on. It worked through the Anglo-Polish Conservative Association to organize meetings with Margaret Thatcher (5 November 1991) and, earlier, with her former press spokesman, Bernard Ingham (17 October 1991). The campaign was aimed at influencing (a) British public opinion, (b) civil servants and ultimately (c) the politicians. There was a realization that if senior civil servants could be swayed then there was a good chance that they could in turn bring round their political masters.

The Federation was compelled to liaise with Polish Government agencies in its campaign, since there were potential problems for the campaign if wires were crossed or there was insufficient co-ordination. But it was important for the Federation to maintain absolute freedom from the Polish Government, both in this and in any further campaigns. The campaign organizers could not be seen as an extension of the Polish diplomatic service, and they enjoyed, in any case, a freedom of manoeuvre which the diplomatic people did not have. There was nevertheless a huge irony in the fact that members of the Polish community who until some two or three years before had been demonstrating outside the Polish Embassy against the Warsaw regime, were now collaborating with Warsaw agencies to bring pressure on the British Government.

The visa campaign was crowned with success when Prime Minister John Major announced on 26 May 1992, shortly before his departure on an official trip to Warsaw, that visa requirements for Poles would be lifted from 1 July. This was to be for an initial trial period of two years.

The visa campaign marked probably the greatest act of community mobilization since the 1970s drive to build the Polish Cultural Centre in west London. It is fair to wonder to what extent it was the Federation's campaign that brought success and to what extent diplomatic pressure from the Polish Government was more telling. Both certainly played a part, but the Federation's campaign was clearly important. The Federation activists who led the campaign were congratulated on the extent and success of their publicity by Home Office officials and also decorated by the Polish Government.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Information on this campaign has been drawn from press sources, from literature and pamphlets put out by the Federation and from conversations with Dr Zymunt Szkopiak and Mr Krzysztof Nowakowski.

Although there was a certain amount of support within the Polish community for a permanent lobbying organization, it was realized that large funds would be necessary for such an establishment. Furthermore, it would be difficult to maintain the impetus of what had been a single-issue campaign into other areas. Articles which appeared in the Polish press after the success of the visa campaign discussed more modest tasks. 'How to deal with the British press' was the title of one article appearing towards the end of 1992.<sup>25</sup> It contained advice for local community activists on how to handle material in the British press which contained unflattering references (and perhaps imprecise information) on Poland or Poles. At the same time the Federation subscribed to a cuttings agency in order to be able more systematically to monitor press comment on Polish matters. During 1994, questionnaires were sent out by the Federation to all candidates for the elections to the European Parliament, asking for their views on a number of issues — including prospective Polish membership of NATO and of the European Union.

The initial period of joy, of enthusiasm for the changes, of enjoyment at being fêted in Poland, rapidly cooled. There was embarrassment at the chaos and confusion of early post-communist and post-Solidarity politics in Poland. Was this personality-based factionalism the most appropriate way to benefit from their hard-won democracy?

By 1993 voices were being heard in the Polish press and in private which indicated that the émigrés had overcome their early excitement about the emergence of the homeland as a 'normal' country, and indeed a sense of disappointment prevailed. Moreover British Poles began to sense the Polish population had, certainly by the end of 1992, become 'bored' with the émigrés. A *Polish Daily* correspondent summarized the mood:

Our relations with the homeland are at present undergoing a process of cooling. On both sides, the king is seen to have no clothes. The period of mutual euphoria has long since passed.... Our roads are moving further and further apart. The Polish community abroad lives in another, separate world. In bourgeois prosperity we worry about local problems....<sup>26</sup>

The final sense of disillusionment on the part of many émigrés came in September 1993 when the elections returned to power the former communists, in the guise of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD). It seemed that the gains of a hard-won victory — a victory for which the Polish people had been struggling for decades — had been thrown away at the ballot box. If the older generation of exiles needed confirmation that they no longer understood the homeland, this seemed to be it.

<sup>25</sup> K. Nowakowski, 'Jak radzić sobie z prasą brytyjską?', *Dziennik Polski*, 19 October 1992.

<sup>26</sup> T. Zablocki-Gwasz, 'Odwrotna strona medalu', *Dziennik Polski*, 24 April 1993.





## Poles In Britain: The Demographic Picture

Establishing the number of Poles in Great Britain — as with the statistics of other established ethnic minorities — is a thorny business and an undertaking in which, in the end, one is driven to a certain amount of calculated guesswork or inspired speculation. The difficulties of arriving at an overall figure result from a number of problems. Chief among these are the inconsistencies and inadequacies of the decennial Census. Since the Second World War the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) has classified foreigners resident in this country on the basis of birthplace. In the first postwar Census, statistics of foreign-born residents were collected according to citizenship as well as country of birth. Hence the 1951 Census listed ‘aliens’ with Polish ‘nationality’ and had separate tables of those Polish-born respondents who were British subjects, or stateless, or, in a very few cases, whose ‘nationality’ was not stated.<sup>1</sup>

This reliance on birthplace as an indicator of ethnic-national origins and affiliations was as imprecise then as it has continued to be since, not least because of the shifting nature of frontiers in east-central Europe in recent times. What was a Pole born in Vilnius during the 1920s to answer to a question regarding country of birth? Vilnius (Wilno) was Polish before the Second World War, was a Soviet city after 1945 and since 1990 has been the capital of the independent republic of Lithuania. A Pole born in Lwów would have had similar problems.<sup>2</sup> By the same token there may well be members of other ethnic-national groups — Ukrainians, for example — who were born on Polish territory but do not admit to any ethnic affiliation with the Polish group. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Polish exodus which took place from Soviet territory during 1942 (i.e. during the years 1942–7) the births of Polish

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<sup>1</sup> Confusingly, British official sources repeatedly use the terms ‘national’ and ‘nationality’ where East and Central Europeans would use the more precise terms ‘citizen’ and ‘citizenship’. ‘Nationality’ would more usually be assumed to mean ethnic affiliation.

<sup>2</sup> Lwów was a Polish city before the Second World War, a Soviet city after 1945, and has been a Ukrainian city since the break-up of the former Soviet Union. In the 1971 Census for Great Britain (Country of Birth tables, p. 25) it is recorded that some 30,830 males and 17,265 females gave their birthplace as being in the USSR. Most of these were over forty years old. It seems possible that some at least of these were Poles (no doubt many too were Ukrainians).



children who were later to settle in Britain were being registered in Iran, East Africa, Italy, Austria and Germany, as well, of course, as in Britain itself. The Census figures give us no way of arriving at the number of such children, since they are registered under the country of birth.

The same problem — shortcomings of the Census data — thwarts attempts to determine the number of Poles born in Britain since the war. The first postwar generation, born to the exiles in the Polish resettlement camps in the late 1940s, are now in their fifth decade and in many cases their children have now grown to maturity. We are, indeed, on the threshold of the third generation of Poles to be born in this country without having any clear idea of how numerous their grandparents' cohort is, never mind their parents'. Despite the inclusion of an 'ethnic question' in the 1991 Census, the terms in which it was framed were so imprecise as to be useless for those researchers interested in white ethnic minorities.<sup>3</sup> This seems to reflect the belief in some quarters of British government, and indeed of the academic establishment, that the only minorities worthy of consideration and study are the 'coloured' minorities, those of non-European origin.

I have deliberately used the expression 'Poles in Britain' rather than 'the Polish community in Britain', since it seemed to me that the latter expression implied a degree of involvement and affiliation with formal community life that may not be justified of all individuals who might be cast as 'Polish' or 'a Pole'. However, even use of the term 'Pole' implies certain assumptions — possibly unwarranted — about the degree of identification that British citizens of Polish background and descent have with their ancestors' country of origin.

There are no reliable sources of statistics from within the Polish community itself. Figures of 150,000 and even 200,000 are regularly quoted without any real basis.<sup>4</sup> Membership of the many clubs and associations is voluntary and partial; there is no all-embracing organization which can be said to include all Poles. Even figures of those who are registered with the network of Polish Catholic parishes — were such figures available — could not be said to be comprehensive. In the first place, they would not include those who, while regarding themselves as Poles, do not profess the Roman Catholic faith (for example Jewish, Protestant and Orthodox Poles). Second,

<sup>3</sup> In a preliminary report on the 1991 Census, Ballard and Singh Kalra have pointed out that no attempt was made in the 1991 Census to identify the numbers of those of Britain's ethnic minorities which are of *European* origin. In the ethnic question which was included in the Census the catch-all category of 'White' was used to subsume all such categories (including therefore those of Irish, Italian, Polish, Ukrainian descent). R. Ballard and Virinder Singh Kalra, *The Ethnic Dimensions of the 1991 Census: A Preliminary Report*, Manchester, 1994, pp. 2–3.

<sup>4</sup> A figure of 200,000 was quoted in a letter dated 21 May 1992 from the leaders of the Federation of Poles in Great Britain to John Major concerning the visa question. *Dziennik Polski*, 26 May 1992.

there are many Poles not registered with a Polish parish either because, through preference or necessity, they attend English Catholic services or else because, being lapsed Catholics, if they practise their faith at all it is to attend services only on the main feast days (for example Christmas and Easter).<sup>5</sup>

With these caveats, however, we can infer some general trends from the figures provided by the five postwar censuses. As can be seen from Table 1, these show that the number of Polish-born members of the population of Great Britain has fallen by more than a half over four decades — and that the decline is gathering pace.

The Polish-born population now forms only 0.14 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom as recorded in 1991 (54,055,693). By comparison the non-European minorities (mostly the ‘New Commonwealth’ immigrants who have arrived since the 1950s) amount to 6 per cent of the population, the largest groups being Indians (834,574), Black Caribbeans (492,797), Pakistanis (474,400), Black Africans (202,475), Asians (191,162) and Bangladeshis (161,271).<sup>6</sup>

Table 1  
Rate of Decline of Polish-born Population in Britain

	(a)	(b)	(c)
Year	Overall number	Decrease on previous decade	(b) as % of (a)
1951	162,339		
1961	127,246	35,093 <sup>7</sup>	21.6%
1971	110,925	16,321	12.8%
1981	93,369	17,556	15.8%
1991	73,738	19,631	21.0%

Source: Census Data: Crown Copyright

A large proportion, therefore, of the Poles who arrived in Britain during the 1940s and remained as political émigrés have passed from the Census figures in the ensuing period, largely as a result of mortality. The numbers remaining to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Britain, the siege of Tobruk or the Warsaw Rising as participants or witnesses are relatively few. An increasing proportion of the surviving exile population of the 1940s are those who came as

5 As an example, while there are 6000 people registered with the Polish parish in Ealing, it is estimated that there are considerably more people of Polish origin — perhaps as many as 10,000 — living in the area. In any case, by no means all parish priests compile statistics or collect address lists of parishioners in a systematic fashion.

6 Ballard and Singh Kalra, *The Ethnic Dimensions of the 1991 Census*, p. 5, table 1.

7 The large decline which followed the 1951 Census was due in large measure to continuing onwards migration. There was an especially large movement of Poles to the United States as a result of the passing of a Bill by the US Congress which facilitated the immigration of former Polish soliers.



children, following their parents, or else as teenage volunteers in the cadet units of the Polish Army ('Junaks'). Now they are grandparents and occupy senior positions in community organizations at national and local level.

The consecutive Census figures show the moving 'blip' that large numbers of military-age males formed in the statistics. In the 1951 Census this 'blip' was formed around the age group between twenty-five and twenty-nine years old. By the time of the 1971 Census, as we see from Table 2, this group — now between forty-five and forty-nine years old — numbered 26,295.

Table 2  
Polish-born Population by Age Breakdown

Age	Number	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
0-29	3480	3.1	3.1
30-39	6875	6.2	9.3
40-44	11615	10.5	19.8
45-49	26295	23.7	43.5
50-54	16210	14.6	58.1
55-59	15430	13.9	89.4
60-69	19285	17.4	89.4
70+	11735	10.6	100.0

Source: 1971 Census: Crown Copyright

Although age breakdown figures of this kind for Poles have not been made available in subsequent censuses,<sup>8</sup> we can extrapolate to a certain extent from the 1971 figures. We know that this five-year age cohort, which accounted for 23.7 per cent of the Polish-born population in 1971, had by 1991 reached the end of its seventh decade (sixty-five to seventy years old). This is the cohort whose gradual disappearance over the next few years will have the most profound effect upon the shape of the Polish community — its age structure, gender balance, and its geographical distribution. On the basis of the Census figures it has been estimated that in 1971, 91,000 Poles were under sixty-five years old, that is, they were under the retirement age for males. Since the number of children was small most of these were of productive age.

It was calculated that this figure would fall to 64,000 in 1981 and to 22,000 in 1991.<sup>9</sup> If this held true then it would mean that by 1991 there

<sup>8</sup> In the 1981 Census (and this was true also for the 1991 Census) statistics of Poles were not broken down in the general tables according to age cohorts, seemingly reflecting a change of policy on the part of the OPCS. Reflecting the United Kingdom's new commitment to European unification, the age cohort figures were provided only for residents who had originated from Britain's European Union partners. Hence there was a breakdown of those born in Luxemburg (392), Denmark (9480) and Greece (12,112) — but not of those in Poland (93,369)!

<sup>9</sup> Z. Stermiński, 'Ilość Polaków w Wielkiej Brytanii. Emigracja w 1971 r.', *Dziennik Polski*, 20 and 21 July 1976.

were over 51,000 Poles (1991 total of 73,738 minus 22,000) of pensionable age in this country. Of course such estimates cannot be precise because they do not take into account a number of unknowns: premature deaths, emigration (including return to Poland), and the continuing small influx which over the twenty-year period from 1971–91 must have reached several thousand. The breakdown of the Census figures according to region indicates that the most marked fall in numbers over the postwar period has taken place in Scotland (Table 3).

Table 3  
Polish-born Population in Scotland

	Total	Men	Women
1951	10,603	9,113	1,490
1961	7,743	6,609	1,134
1971	6,475	5,400	1,075
1981	5,083	4,094	989
1991	3,623	2,704	919

Source: Census Data: Crown Copyright

The wartime settlement of Poles in Scotland was already sharply reduced by repatriation, emigration and migration south of the border by the time the 1951 Census was taken. Since then the number of Polish-born has been reduced by almost two-thirds. Main concentrations are in the Strathclyde and Lothian regions (Glasgow and Edinburgh) with smaller numbers in the Central region, Fife and Tayside. Given the small number of Polish women who remained in Scotland after 1950 and the degree of exogamy which resulted (Polish men marrying Scottish wives), it seems unlikely that there will remain a Polish community of any significance in Scotland as we move into the third millenium.<sup>10</sup>

The largest concentration of Poles in Britain remains in the Greater London area: 21,823 in the 1991 Census, or 29 per cent of the total Polish-born population of Britain (Table 4). Some 9419 of this total live in Inner London boroughs, with Hammersmith, Wandsworth, Westminster, Kensington, Lambeth and Camden favoured locations. The remaining 12,404 live in the nineteen Outer London boroughs. What strikes the eye here is the large concentration in Ealing — some 3635, or more than a quarter of the Outer London total. Indeed, if we add the totals for the three most favoured Outer London boroughs — Ealing (3635), Barnet (1436) and Brent (1483) — we find that they amount to more than half the Outer London total (6554) and almost a third of the Greater London total. This is a measure of the relative prosperity of Poles — their drift from the inner-city boroughs to more favoured upmarket residential areas.

10 1991 Census for Scotland, Table 7.



Table 4  
Polish-born Population of London, 1991

## a) Inner London

Borough	Total	Male	Female
City	8	5	3
Camden	920	406	514
Hackney	567	274	293
Hammersmith	1209	526	683
Haringey	713	339	374
Islington	443	222	221
Kensington	1002	385	617
Lambeth	959	444	515
Lewisham	417	195	222
Newham	247	122	125
Southwark	376	179	197
Tower Hamlets	286	171	115
Wandsworth	1207	519	688
Westminster	1065	503	562
Total	9419	4290	5129

## b) Outer London

Borough	Total	Male	Female
Barking	79	52	27
Barnet	1436	619	817
Bexley	143	81	62
Brent	1483	700	783
Bromley	412	182	230
Croydon	640	311	329
Ealing	3635	1556	2079
Enfield	470	250	220
Greenwich	190	86	104
Harrow	552	253	299
Havering	175	102	73
Hillingdon	332	193	139
Hounslow	791	357	434
Kingston	267	138	129
Merton	587	249	338
Redbridge	452	231	221
Richmond	382	169	213
Sutton	201	92	109
Waltham Forest	177	82	95
Total	12404	5703	6701
Totals (a+b)	21823	9993	11830

Source: 1991 Census: Crown Copyright

Table 5  
Polish-born Population of England and Wales, by Region, 1991

Region	Total	Male	Female
London	21,823	9,993	11,830
Avon	966	623	343
Bedfordshire	1006	590	416
Berkshire	1611	908	703
Buckinghamshire	1158	694	464
Cambridgeshire	1048	647	401
Cheshire	728	426	302
Cleveland	268	192	76
Cornwall	181	124	57
Cumberland	269	196	73
Derbyshire	1381	916	465
Devon	845	533	312
Dorset	528	307	221
Durham	167	121	46
East Sussex	771	437	334
Essex	1080	657	423
Gloucestershire	659	419	240
Gtr Manchester	4098	2223	1875
Hants	1107	634	473
Hereford & Worcs.	791	508	283
Hertfordshire	1092	600	492
Humberside	540	335	205
Isle of Wight	90	67	23
Kent	918	521	397
Lancashire	1509	1015	494
Leicestershire	1800	944	856
Lincolnshire	512	361	151
Merseyside	597	399	198
Norfolk	374	251	123
Northants	709	414	295
Northumberland	165	131	34
North Yorkshire	380	234	146
Nottinghamshire	2532	1548	974
Oxfordshire	690	420	270
Shropshire	320	204	116
Somerset	271	183	88
South Yorkshire	1541	1198	343
Staffordshire	1458	1032	426
Suffolk	534	358	176
Surrey	1069	605	464
Tyne and Wear	374	254	120
Warwickshire	624	392	232
West Yorkshire	4170	2408	1762
West Midlands	3404	2111	1293
West Sussex	660	414	246
Wiltshire	1231	665	566
Wales	2066	1441	625

Source: 1991 Census: Crown Copyright



London apart, the largest concentrations of Poles are in West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester, the West Midlands and Nottinghamshire, as Table 5 shows. These figures illustrate how the original settlement patterns of the 1940s have maintained their influence on the 'shape' of the community: there is a predominance of the industrial regions of the North and Midlands over the South and the Home Counties. Where migration has occurred among the older generation, it has chiefly been from inner-city wards to more middle-class residential areas in the suburbs.

An even more interesting light is thrown on the statistics by the gender breakdown. Of the 73,738 Polish-born residents of Great Britain in the 1991 Census, the male to female ratio revealed was 57:43. This is a significant imbalance, but, as we have seen, an imbalance has existed since Poles established themselves in Britain during the late 1940s. Indeed, if one considers that the original settlement population consisted primarily of units of the Polish armed forces, this factor should not come as a surprise. What is significant is that this imbalance has been steadily easing as the figures in Table 6 illustrate (figures in brackets show the percentage decrease over the previous Census figure):

Table 6  
Polish-born Population of Britain, by Gender

	Male	Female	Ratio
1951	114,766	47,573	71:29
1961	89,077 (22%)	38,169 (20%)	70:30
1971	74,410 (16%)	36,510 (4%)	67:33
1981	59,169 (20%)	34,207 (6%)	63:37
1991	42,357 (28%)	31,381 (8%)	57:43

Source: Census Data: Crown Copyright

It can be seen that while both tables show a drop — i.e. the number of both Polish-born males and females has been decreasing — the rate of loss among the male population has been much sharper. There is a strong possibility that in the next Census the two groups will be close to balance or even that there may be a small predominance of females. As the projection on the accompanying graph shows, it is likely that the two lines will cross when the figures from the next Census are added. (The graph projections indicate a male population of some 26,000 and a female population of 28,000, or a combined total under 55,000.)

This effect is even more marked when one turns to examine the breakdown of figures for the Greater London area in the 1991 Census (Table 7). In 1991, for the first time, the number of Polish-born females actually *exceeds* the number of males. (Indeed the number of Polish-born females actually shows a small *increase* over the 1981 figure.) It seems that the London figures do not so much mirror processes that are occurring in the country as a whole, but rather anticipate them.

Table 7  
Polish-born Population of Greater London, by Gender

	Male	Female	Total	Ratio
1951	30,367	18,886	49,253	62:38
1961	24,807	16,177	40,984	61:39
1971	18,440	14,065	32,505	57:43
1981	13,458	12,322	25,780	52:48
1991	9,993	12,730	22,723	44:56

Source: Census Data: Crown Copyright

Why should this be? And why has the Polish-born female population not been declining at the same rate as the male population? One reason is that, as we have seen earlier, there has been a small but constant trickle of younger Poles arriving to settle in this country since the late 1950s. The overwhelming majority of these new arrivals from Poland in the postwar period have been women and in most cases the reason for their settlement in this country is marriage to a British citizen. In the period after 1956 — following the political ‘thaw’ in Poland — many women came and settled as the wives of members of the original settlement population. In subsequent decades Polish-born females have married into the younger generation of the Polish community, but a number have also married British husbands of non-Polish descent.

If we take the year 1980 as an example, according to Home Office figures 650 Poles were accepted for settlement; 190 were accepted for settlement on arrival and 470 were given leave to remain following removal of the time limit on their stay in the United Kingdom. Of the total there were seventy men, 530 women and fifty children. Of those who were permitted to stay following removal of the time limit, all the men (sixty) and 370 of the women (out of 390) were accepted for settlement by reason of marriage.<sup>11</sup> Although the figure of Poles settling in Britain may vary over time, there seems no reason to suspect that the ratio of the sexes and the reasons for settlement will have varied greatly. It is these ‘newcomers’ (the earliest cohorts of whom are now grandmothers!) who have slowed the decrease in the Polish-born female population, although the numbers of new arrivals have been insufficient to prevent an overall decrease.

The conclusions we can draw from these figures are clear. In the first place, while the Polish-born population is declining in absolute terms, the original ‘political exiles’ are a diminishing component of the Polish-born element. How strongly the ‘newcomer’ element is represented in these tables we can calculate. According to the 1971 Census, some 13,470 persons born in Poland had arrived in Britain between 1950 and 1971. In the period between 1971 and 1975 Sheila

<sup>11</sup> *Control of Immigration Statistics, United Kingdom, 1980* (Cmnd 8199), HMSO, London, 1981.



Patterson has estimated the number of new arrivals to be about 2600.<sup>12</sup> From 1976 until 1990 a further 7060 Poles arrived.<sup>13</sup> This amounts to 23,130 newcomers altogether — or some 31 per cent of the 1991 Census total.

In the second place, the Polish-born element of the British population (and, one presumes, of the Polish community) will become dominated in numerical terms by females over the next few decades — always assuming, of course, that settlement patterns remain constant and that there is no extraordinary influx such as that which occurred between 1939–47. Patterson estimates that 75 per cent of the newcomers arriving between 1950 and 1971 were female.<sup>14</sup> As we can see from the 1980 Home Office settlement figures quoted above, this may be a conservative figure, but if we apply this percentage to the whole of the postwar influx, it would give us a figure of more than 17,000 Polish-born females arriving since the war. As we can see from the 1991 Census statistics, the overall number of Polish-born females in Britain is 30,462. So it would seem that as regards the Polish-born female population, 'newcomers' already outnumber the 1940s exiles.

Attempting to calculate the numbers of second- and third-generation Poles is even more problematic. Stermiński mentions a figure of 28,000 children, apparently a figure agreed at a meeting of the Union of Polish Journalists on the basis of the 1971 Census figures.<sup>15</sup> Writing of the 1981 Census some years later Szczepanik suggested a figure of 34,000, based on attributing one child to each Polish female in the 1981 Census.<sup>16</sup> (The attribution of only one child may seem cautious, but there has certainly been no return to the high birth-rates of pre-war rural Poland when the numbers of children born to peasant women sometimes went into double figures.) Zebrowska has argued though that it might be more appropriate to use the 1951 or 1961 Census figures since many of the first generation who died in the interim would also have had children. This would have produced a second-generation figure of 43,000.<sup>17</sup>

It seems that a figure somewhat over 40,000 for the early 1980s may not be far off the mark. In attempting to calculate the numbers of second-generation Poles born in Britain, I moved from the national and regional statistics of the Census to local statistics collected for the

12 S. Patterson, 'The Poles: An Exile Community in Britain', in J.L. Watson (ed.), *Between Two Cultures. Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, Oxford, 1977, p. 216.

13 *Control of Immigration Statistics, United Kingdom, 1980* (Cmnd 8199), 1985 (Cmnd 9863), 1990 (Cmnd 1571).

14 S. Patterson, 'The Poles: An Exile Community in Britain', p. 216.

15 Z. Stermiński, 'Ilość Polaków w Wielkiej Brytanii'.

16 E. Szczepanik, 'Ilu Polaków zamieszkuje Wielką Brytanię?', *Dziennik Polski*, 21 May 1983.

17 A. Zebrowska, 'Integration or Assimilation? A Study of Second Generation Poles in Britain', PhD thesis, University of Surrey, 1986, p. 70.

Linguistic Minorities Project of the Institute of Education (University of London).<sup>18</sup> During 1980–1 the LMP survey carried out studies in Coventry and Bradford, including interviews in Polish households. The interviews were carried out on a random basis and statistics of household composition — including ages of residents — were logged. In the Bradford case 458 individuals were logged and in Coventry 484. Although there is no such thing as a ‘typical’ Polish community, there seems no reason to regard these two, one from the Midlands and one from the North, as particularly uncharacteristic.

I attempted to extrapolate using the LMP local figures for 1981 and the National Census figures of 1971 (as I have indicated, the last Census for which age breakdown figures of the Polish-born component was included in the published tables). I assumed that anyone younger than twenty-five years old in 1971 was likely to have been born in Britain. (We know that 13,470 Polish citizens arrived in Britain between 1950 and 1971, but it is unlikely that more than a small minority were under twenty-five by the time of the Census.) The percentage of respondents below twenty-five years old figuring in the 1971 Census amounts to a mere 1.79 per cent of the Polish-born total. Extending this to include those who were under thirty-five years old by the 1981 Census, it is possible that the overall number would have risen slightly, but as a percentage would have increased faster because of attrition in the upper age cohorts. I am allowing therefore that the under-thirty-five cohort may have increased to between 3 and 4 per cent by 1981.

Taking those householders under the age of thirty-five in the LMP survey, for Bradford we have 210 out of 458 and for Coventry 196 out of 484. This gives 46 per cent and 41 per cent respectively. If we take 43 per cent as an average of the two figures and apply it retrospectively to the 1981 Census figure, it would yield a figure of 40,242. This would be the ‘hidden component’ of the Polish community — those born in Britain who do not figure in Census statistics.

Of course such calculations must be hedged about with all sorts of qualifications. We may be including the children of mixed marriages as ‘Polish’. And to what extent would we be justified in including even those whose parents are both Polish but have no contact with Polish community life? It is highly unlikely that more than a small percentage of these under-thirty-fives play any part in the activities of the Polish community. Such problems are compounded of course in the third generation.

Returning to the general argument, however, if we examine parish statistics the pattern of an ageing community is confirmed. Comparing figures of life-cycle rituals celebrated by the Polish priest across a forty-year period since the founding of almost any Polish parish, we

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<sup>18</sup> I am grateful to Anna Morawska for supplying me with the relevant statistical tables from the Linguistic Minorities Project research.



find a clear pattern. In Coventry, for example, during the first twenty-five-year period of the existence of the Polish parish (1949–73) the statistics were (figures in brackets are the annual average over the period):

Baptisms:	393 (16)
Weddings:	720 (29)
Funerals:	260 (10)

Yet in the 15 year period from 1974–89 they were:

Baptisms:	117 (8)
Weddings:	183 (12)
Funerals:	306 (20) <sup>19</sup>

From this it can be seen that whereas the birth (baptisms) figure has dropped markedly (the annual average is only half what it was during the earlier period), the wedding figure has dropped even more sharply (reflecting no doubt the degree of marriage to non-Polish partners), while the rate of funerals has doubled. Other communities show comparable trends. Manchester, for example, boasts one of the largest communities outside the London area. Comparable statistics from parish sources are as follows:<sup>20</sup>

1947–71:	Baptisms	1603 (64)
	Weddings	1541 (61)
	Funerals	406 (16)
1972–86:	Baptisms	307 (20)
	Weddings	257 (10)
	Funerals	660 (44)

In this example the figures are even more dramatic. While births (baptisms) have dropped by over two-thirds, and weddings to one-sixth of their former level, the number of deaths (funerals) has increased almost threefold.

It is possible though that some parish communities are not suffering to the same extent. That is, their level of marriages and births is higher, simply because they are more vibrant and are more successful at drawing young people in. Certainly we should be wary about drawing conclusions too rapidly from such figures. One Polish writer, commenting in 1976 on the figures from the 1971 Census, attempted to

<sup>19</sup> Parish statistics are taken from the commemorative booklets produced by the Polish parish in Coventry, 'Polska parafia w Coventry, 1949–1974', n.d., p. 21; and '40 lat polskiej parafii Coventry–Rugby, 1949–1989', n.d., p. 45.

<sup>20</sup> Parish statistics are taken from the commemorative booklet 'Polska Parafia i Kościół Miłosierdzia Bożego w Manchester, 1947–1987', n.d., p. 29.

estimate how many parishioners the Ealing parish would have in fifteen years' time (in 1991). After careful calculation he came to the conclusion that the whole parish would number 850–900 people — or half of that at the time of writing. The majority of parishioners, he concluded, would be sons and grandsons of the wartime emigration. It was, he added, only an approximate estimate.<sup>21</sup> In fact the Ealing parish in the early 1990s has knowledge of some 6000 Poles in the borough, and the belief is that many more live in the area which are not on its books. What Sterminski (author of the above estimate) did not take into account was not only that newcomers from Poland would tend to settle disproportionately in the London area, but also that a large and lively community such as Ealing might in fact act as a 'draw' to younger couples of Polish origin who wanted to bring up their children in a Polish environment. 'Polish Ealing' has the vitality and infrastructure to attract couples who might otherwise purchase property elsewhere. Nevertheless the general lesson to be drawn from such statistics is that Polish communities are not reproducing themselves in biological terms and are seemingly caught up in a process of decline that for many may be terminal.

### *Conclusions*

1. The Polish-born population in Great Britain is declining in numerical terms.
2. Figures from successive postwar censuses show that the decline is becoming more pronounced, and a major dip in the figures can be expected over the next two decades.
3. The Polish population is an ageing population with an increasing preponderance of retired and dependent elderly.
4. Poles are widely dispersed throughout the British Isles, but main concentrations exist in London and certain other urban centres. Within Greater London there is a concentration of Poles in certain boroughs.
5. The gender imbalance (preponderance of males) within the Polish-born community has been reduced and the number of males relative to females will continue to fall. In the London area there is already a predominance of Polish females.
6. Poles are not reproducing themselves in sufficient numbers to guarantee the continuity of the community (as shown by parish statistics). The tendency towards contraction threatens the existence of smaller, regional communities, and ultimately some of the larger communities too.

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<sup>21</sup> Z. Stermiński, 'Ilość Polaków w Wielkiej Brytanii', 21 July 1976.



7. Statistics of Poles according to birth and other indicators of descent or affiliation cannot be assumed to demonstrate active participation in community life and activities. All indicators show that this is declining.

## 5 Structures of the Polish Community

### *The Federation of Poles in Great Britain*

The Federation of Poles in Great Britain is the umbrella organization for the majority of Polish voluntary associations in this country. It is a non-party organization which traces its history back to February 1947. The Federation took on a new lease of life however, in the aftermath of the political changes in Poland during 1989–90 and the transformation this engendered in the leadership of the emigracja. With the winding up of the exile government's activities (a process which took place over a period of months) there was a need for a new body to take over the steering role, as Polish community activists faced up to their loss of role as a political opposition.

Now (following the handing over of the presidential insignia) we must decide what kind of character the Polish community in Britain is to have. Above all we have ceased to be a 'political emigration'. We no longer have a reason not to accept British citizenship. In this situation, irrespective of the adjective we may prefix to the word 'emigration' we have become a national (i.e. ethnic) minority in Great Britain, having both duties and rights resulting from that state of affairs.<sup>1</sup>

In the first half of 1991 a lively debate developed in the columns of the *Polish Daily* as the 'new directions' facing the Polish community were outlined, and the specifications for a new overarching, co-ordinating and policy-making body were discussed.<sup>2</sup> One point was assumed by all writers: that the ending of the community's political role should not simply lead to the disintegration and break-up of its unity

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<sup>1</sup> Z. Szkopiak, 'Zjednoczenie Polaków w Wielkiej Brytanii', *Dziennik Polski*, 16 January 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Articles in *Dziennik Polski* in the first half of 1991. See for example Z. Szkopiak, 'Zjednoczenie Polaków w Wielkiej Brytanii'; M. Kwiatkowski, 'Zjednoczenie Polaków w Wielkiej Brytanii', *Dziennik Polski*, 4 February 1991; W. Moszczyński, 'Nowe Zjednoczenie — opiekun polskiego społeczeństwa', *Dziennik Polski*, 12 February 1991; A. Rynkiewicz, 'Przyszła działalność Zjednoczenia Polskiego', *Dziennik Polski*, 20 February 1991; C. Zychowicz, 'Przyszłość Zjednoczenia Polskiego w Wielkiej Brytanii', *Dziennik Polski*, 9 April 1991; W. Moszczyński, 'Zjednoczenie Polskie — rumak czy wielbłąd?', *Dziennik Polski*, 29 April 1991.



and sense of purpose. The vacuum caused by the winding up of the government needed to be filled with a body which could represent the interests of the community in dealings with the homeland (Polish government) agencies and representatives and with British officialdom at both national and local level. Initial suggestions were made that a 'new' organization — a Polish Congress or Union — should be formed from the personnel who had gained experience in representative work in the exile Government and National Council.

However, a counter-argument held that there was no need to create a further, parallel body to the existing Federation; personnel from the political structures could be drawn into the structure of the Federation and their experience called on in this way. The organization founded in the late 1940s, which had continued in existence 'just in case', had encountered its moment of need. The revamped body should, it was suggested, develop its activities along three main axes: (a) internal, Polish community affairs: there was a strong need to develop closer contacts with Polish centres outside London, to ensure co-operation between agencies, to encourage educational and cultural activities and to promote social welfare for elderly and isolated Poles; (b) activities directed towards the homeland: the need to provide specialist help in a number of areas for Poland at a time when the homeland was undergoing such a radical economic and political transformation; political and cultural co-operation with Poland and with Polish government agencies; organizing trips, holiday camps for children and young people in Poland; (c) influencing British social and political agencies (including the media): the systematic establishment of contacts with British agencies at national and local level with a view to promoting Polish causes. At one extreme, calls were made for more Polish representation in British political life. Implicit in the early exchanges was the need for a lobbying organization which was to grow stronger in the months that followed.<sup>3</sup>

The events of 1989 in Poland not only marked a political watershed for the emigracja, they also drew attention to the demographic problems it faced. Freed now from their focus on correcting the errors and injustices of the past, the community leaders were now forced to look to the future. Who was to lead the community when the present generation of exiles — virtually the last of the wartime arrivals who had any memory of pre-war Poland — passed from the scene? The need for younger elements within the community to take over responsibility for community activities, particularly in the light of its changed circumstances and orientation, was stressed repeatedly at meetings and in print. Also stressed was the need to end the ghettoized existence of so many years and re-orientate the community as an ethnic minority whose acknowledged future lay in Great Britain.

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<sup>3</sup> W. Mieciejczyk, *Dziennik Polski*, 23 January 1991.

At its 1991 Congress members of the Federation accepted a new provisional statute designed to take account of the changed state of affairs and also elected a new governing body. The new Council was to consist of an eight-member Presidium,<sup>4</sup> five representatives of organizations from the provinces and five representatives of the following organizations: the SPK (Ex-Combatants' Association), POSK (Polish Social and Cultural Centre), PMS (the Polish Educational Society Abroad), the ZHP (Union of Polish Scouts) and the SLP (Association of Polish Airmen). In the eighteen-strong Council, therefore, there was an attempt in the new statute to widen representation so as to involve more those Poles living in the provinces. However, considerable influence still remained in the hands of established (historic) organizations such as the SPK and this has come in for criticism.

The newly elected Chairman was to be Dr Zygmunt Szkopiak, until its dissolution Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Polish government in exile. Although this raised once again the question of the 'carousel' of offices which are exchanged by the members of the émigré political establishment (letters to the press from critics referred rather sourly to the 'émigré nomenklatura'), for the first time members of the generation born in Britain were elected to positions of responsibility.<sup>5</sup>

Membership of the Federation, it was agreed, would be open to all Polish organizations or institutions in Great Britain which, once admitted, should then send representatives to the Open General Assembly every two years. The member organizations could also propose delegates to the Council and move resolutions via the Federation authorities. The Secretary-General attempted to assuage the doubts of some members of the community:

The elections to office within the Federation take place in an open and democratic manner. Those entitled to take part in elections are members of the Council and delegates at the Assembly who derive their mandate from elections within their own organizations. Of course the Federation of Poles does not represent all Poles in Great Britain and has no such ambition. In each community organized social or cultural life embraces only those people who wish voluntarily to take part in it, and that means the majority of those in Great Britain.<sup>6</sup>

There is thus no 'direct' access or vote to the Federation by members of the Polish community. The Federation is democratic only in the sense that the TUC is democratic. Only through the local and national organizations is there a role for the aspiring community activist. This in

<sup>4</sup> The 38th Assembly of the Federation took place on 8–9 June 1991 in POSK (Hammersmith). *Tydzień Polski*, 8 June 1991.

<sup>5</sup> *Dziennik Polski*, 11 June 1991.

<sup>6</sup> 'Zjednoczenie Polskie wyjaśnia' (letter by R. Zakrzewski, Secretary General of the Federation, to the *Polish Daily*), *Dziennik Polski*, 11 October 1991.



a sense 'insulates' the Federation and its leadership from the potential shocks that direct democracy might involve.

There are reasons for such a cautious approach. In the first place, it would be difficult to determine who would qualify to vote, were such an openly democratic system to be adopted. What criteria of ethnic affiliation (Polish birth? descent and family background? community involvement?) could be adopted? Membership of Polish institutions might be taken as the criterion, except for the fact that it would be difficult to filter out multiple qualification that membership of more than one organization would give. The existing system is also beneficial in the sense that it promotes only the proven and dedicated community workers. However, it has not passed without criticism and one major problem is that the Federation remains remote from ordinary members of the community.<sup>7</sup>

In June 1991 the Federation included some seventy-five organizations within its aegis. This figure included the main national associations as well as local groups such as choirs and Polish clubs. Also listed were local 'federations' which had sprung up to co-ordinate social and community activities within the area or region.<sup>8</sup> Despite being composed of institutions, rather than individuals, membership was in a process of flux.<sup>9</sup>

It is significant that no parishes were affiliated to the Federation. There are a number of reasons for this. The organizational structure of the Polish Roman Catholic community has always kept at a distance from the political émigré-combatant focus of émigré activity, although priests could, and did, join local combatants' groups and clubs as individuals. The recognition has been in the past that the work of the Church is of a different nature to the more secular concerns of the émigrés, and the two should not be mixed or confused. Despite the ending of the 'political opposition role' of the emigracja and the winding up of the government in exile, this tendency has been maintained. There is a reluctance to see Church organizations or parishes 'subordinated' to outside forces.<sup>10</sup> A further consideration is that during the period 1992–3 the Church was undergoing its own

<sup>7</sup> For example, J. Szafrński, 'Przyszłość emigracji', *Dziennik Polski*, 30 May 1991; M. Hulacki (letter to editor), *Dziennik Polski*, 22 May 1991; and more recently, J. Kin. 'Kto jest przywódcą polskiej emigracji?', *Orzeł Biały*, no. 1499, April 1994, London.

<sup>8</sup> Letter by Mr R.A. Zakrewski, Secretary General of the Federation.

<sup>9</sup> 'A report of November 1991 mentioned that the local Polish Catholic Centre in Nottingham had returned to the Federation after a delegation had visited the city in the course of the year. (It had withdrawn some three years earlier.) The same report mentioned that a further organization, Medical Aid for Poland, was also on the point of joining.' A. Czyżowski, 'Z działalności Zjednoczenia Polskiego', *Dziennik Polski*, 5 November 1991.

<sup>10</sup> Ks. S. Swierczyński, 'Parafialne Rady Duszpasterskie w Zjednoczeniu?', *Dziennik Polski*, 22 April 1994.

process of restructuring in order to ensure a greater degree of participation by lay Catholics in the Polish parish structure. It was not an opportune moment for formal links. This is not to say that the Church is not supportive of the changes which are taking place in the community and of the aims of the Federation. The Rector of the Polish Catholic Mission was present at both the 1991 and 1993 Assemblies and spoke in positive terms of its aims, acknowledging it as being the most representative body of Poles in Great Britain.<sup>11</sup>

The claim was being made at this time (and later in 1993) that the Federation was now being recognized as the main representative body of Poles in Great Britain by the British as well as the Polish authorities. Confirmation of the latter claim came in a letter from the Polish Consul-General in London to the *Polish Daily*.<sup>12</sup> But this assertion needs to be qualified. As late as the summer of 1993, the Federation was not recognized as having any influence over the — admittedly declining — Polish communities in Scotland, which had their own co-ordinating body. Indeed, the report of the 39th Congress in 1993 specified that the 136 delegates had come only 'from England and Wales'.<sup>13</sup> In any case, as deputy chairman Wiktor Moszczyński pointed out at the time, even if the Federation were treated by the Polish and British authorities as the leading organization for Poles in Britain, it would take a considerable time before the whole of the Polish community would treat it as such.<sup>14</sup>

Also discussed at the 1991 General Open Meeting were the financing of the Federation's future activities and its plan of action. The agreed aims of the Federation were:

1. To co-ordinate the activities of Polish organizations and institutions in Great Britain.
2. To represent and defend the interests of the Polish community in Great Britain *vis-à-vis* authorities at local and national level.
3. To co-operate with Polish communities in other countries and with the World Federation of Poles Abroad.
4. To co-operate with official Polish agencies (i.e. consular and diplomatic representatives, but also with the *Stowarzyszenie 'Wspolnota Polska'* (Association of the Polish Commonwealth) established by the Warsaw government to liaise with the emigrant communities).
5. To protect the good name of Poles and of Poland.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in H. Miziniak, '39 Walny Zjazd Zjednoczenia Polskiego w Wielkiej Brytanii', *Dziennik Polski*, 1 May 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from the Polish Consul-General, J. Kochanowski, *Dziennik Polski*, 15 July 1991.

<sup>13</sup> H. Miziniak, '39 Walny Zjazd Zjednoczenia Polskiego w Wielkiej Brytanii'.

<sup>14</sup> Comments made at Polish Consulate meeting, 'Spotkanie 100', 7 March 1992.

<sup>15</sup> *Tydzień Polski*, 8 June 1991. Also *Kalendarz Dziennika Polskiego 1993*, pp. 82–3.



The 1991 Congress carried out a reorganization calling into being a number of new commissions charged with various tasks. Of most interest was perhaps the Commission for Polish Affairs, since it in turn spawned a number of sub-commissions including those for 'visa' affairs (the move which developed into a campaign to have visa requirement dropped for Poles visiting Britain — see previous chapter), for the promotion of social welfare (concern for elderly Poles, liaison with local authorities), and for economic aid (to Poland).<sup>16</sup> The list of subcommissions indicates the range of activities which the Federation was pursuing — in large measure through the initiative and energy of younger members — and the way in which the orientations of the community leadership had become geared towards more immediate and pressing goals than what had seemed for years the Holy Grail of political change in Poland. Some of these concerns and the campaigns they engendered are discussed elsewhere in this study. In 1993 the Federation took over new offices in Hammersmith at the Polish Cultural Centre (POSK). Its activities included running an advice bureau on Polish affairs (in conjunction with other Polish organizations), producing the information guide, *Polski Informator*, and running a Polish Business Centre.

### *The Polish Catholic Church in Great Britain*

The changes which the Polish community has undergone over the past five decades (both in terms of structures and personnel) has not left the Polish Catholic establishment in Britain untouched. In 1960 only three Polish communities had their own churches (Devonia, Manchester and Bradford), while some thirteen had their own parish halls.<sup>17</sup> By 1993 the seventy-eight parish centres in England and Wales supported thirty churches, thirteen chapels, fifty-four parish clubs and thirty-nine presbyteries.<sup>18</sup> Few of the priests who arrived during the 1940s now remain. In 1961, Sheila Patterson observed that most priests were over fifty-five years old, and she expressed the view that Polish parishes 'may be relatively short-lived'.<sup>19</sup> Such fears have not been borne out by events. By 1983, the Secretary of the Polish Catholic Mission was writing that more than half the priests were under fifty.<sup>20</sup> It is clear

<sup>16</sup> H. Miziniak, '39 Walny Zjazd Zjednoczenia Polskiego w Wielkiej Brytanii'.

<sup>17</sup> B. Czaykowski and B. Sulik, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, Paris, 1961, p. 435.

<sup>18</sup> Ks. S. Swierzyński (Rector of the Polish Catholic Mission), 'Devonia — by sluzyla dalsze 100 lat', *Dziennik Polski*, 23 November 1993.

<sup>19</sup> S. Patterson, 'Polish London', in R. Glass *et al.* (eds), *London: Aspects of Change*, London, 1964, pp. 328–9.

<sup>20</sup> Tworek, *Informator Duszpasterstwa Polskiego w Wielkiej Brytanii*, London, 1983, pp. 208–9.

then to what extent the intervening two decades had seen replacement of the older generation of priests.

For the most part their places were taken by priests from Poland, trained in Lublin, Paris or Rome. Only a few priests have emerged from within the ranks of the exile community. The newcomers have brought youth, energy and commitment, but they were not always prepared for the reception they received, nor for the problems they encountered. On the one hand there has been a need to keep their distance and not be drawn into political and personal rivalries within the community. On the other hand, priests have found themselves isolated socially, many being long distances from their Polish colleagues and any intellectual discourse. Many were not sufficiently prepared for the specific and very difficult conditions of work in an émigré parish. As an institution, however, the network of Polish Catholic Centres (the Polish term used is *Polski Ośrodek Katolicki* — POK) has remained the most important and most enduring element of the Polish community. Surprisingly, perhaps, in view of the decline in the numbers of Poles in Britain overall, the size of the Polish Catholic presence as measured by the number of priests is approximately the same as it was in the early settlement years. The 1950 *Catholic Directory* revealed that there were ninety-three Polish Catholic priests in England and Wales, with a further ten serving Polish communities in Scotland. Almost four and a half decades later there were 103 priests in England and Wales (a further four in Scotland),<sup>21</sup> although ten retired priests were included in this figure. But it seems too that the number over the intervening period had been even higher, since according to another source, in 1978 there were as many as 125 Polish priests.<sup>22</sup>

This Polish presence is by far the largest ‘foreign-language appendage’ of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain. Although there are several national groups which have their own priests — the largest contingents of which are the Italians and the Ukrainians (about twenty priests each) — no minority group approaches the provision in numbers which the Poles enjoy. The reasons for this are partly historical of course, but it may be asked why, so many years after the war, when the numbers of the Polish community have contracted, there should still be such provision for a community many of whose current members are now more fluent in English than in Polish? After all most of the Polish priests are now far better resourced than their predecessors; apart from the churches, presbyteries and club premises that exist as a focus for community worship and parish social life, most have telephones, photocopiers, cars — the kind of equipment designed to ease and speed communication.

<sup>21</sup> *Catholic Directory 1950*, pp. 431–2 and *Catholic Directory 1994*, pp. 576–7.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Radzik, *Z dziejów społeczności polskiej w Wielkiej Brytanii (1945–1990)*, p. 55.



There are several reasons for the continuing high number. One of them is certainly the number of elderly in the community. Because of demographic factors, priests are now involved in far more home visits and hospital visits to elderly Poles. Some priests complain that this leaves them with insufficient time for work with young people. Many of the larger parishes have more than one priest to cope with the work involved: Balham has three, for example, Slough and Southampton have two, and Ealing five! It is unlikely though that such an overall number will be maintained very far into the next millenium.<sup>23</sup>

While all Polish priests in Britain are subject to the authority of the Polish Catholic Mission in London, they can be broadly divided into two categories. On the one hand there are diocesan priests who are recruited usually via a request from the Rector of the Polish Catholic Mission to the Polish Episcopate. Either a priest will volunteer or a Polish bishop will delegate a young curate from his diocese with the task of travelling to Britain and taking up duties in the 'parish' to which he has been directed by the PCM.<sup>24</sup>

However certain Polish parishes have remained in the 'gift', so to speak, of particular religious orders. The largest of these orders is the Society of Christ (*Towarzystwo Chrystusowe*), which provides some twenty of the Polish priests in Great Britain and has responsibility for the parishes at Ashton, Manchester, Luton-Dunstable, Putney and Southampton. The Society of Christ is in fact a 'purpose-built' order, created by the pre-war Polish primate, Cardinal Hlond, specifically to cater for the spiritual needs of the Polish diaspora.<sup>25</sup>

Another influential order is that of the Marian Fathers which (like the Society of Christ) has extended its activities into many areas of the world outside Poland and has a significant presence in North America. The centre of the Marian Fathers' activities in Britain is at Hereford, where a headquarters has existed since 1950. For many years the Marian Fathers also ran the only Polish secondary school for boys in the country, at Fawley Court near Henley. Although the school closed in 1986 the country house with its extensive grounds is still used as a residence for the Polish elderly. The Marian Fathers have other centres at Ealing, Cardiff, Slough and Reading, although Lampeter — once the

23 The Chairman of the Polish Benevolent Fund, the Polish Mission's 'business arm', raised the prospect of only some fifteen to twenty parishes being viable when the 'present generation' (i.e. the last of the wartime emigracja) died out in another fifteen years or so. It was, he said, a pessimistic outlook, but one which was being discussed in the Mission as they did their planning for the future. Increasing numbers of parishes would be unable to support a priest. Conversation with Mr J. Palmi, Polish Catholic Mission, 8 November 1993.

24 'Przepisy obowiązując polskich księży w Anglii i Walii', in Tworek, *Informator Duszpasterstwa Polskiego*, p. 42.

25 Z. Zieliński, 'Rola Kardynała Hlonda w organizowaniu duszpasterstwa emigracyjnego', in Z. Zieliński and S. Wilk (eds), *Kościół w II Rzeczypospolitej*, Lublin, 1981.

centre of a thriving Polish agricultural community — is now regarded as a 'dead' parish. Other Polish orders active in Britain include the Bernadine Fathers, the Jesuits, the Pallotyne order, the Pauline Fathers and the Salesians. There are also orders of Polish nuns active in Britain. Perhaps the best-known is the Sisters of Nazareth (*Nazaretanki*) who were responsible for many years for the running of the only Polish secondary school for girls at Pitsford (near Northampton).

The presence of so many priests from different Polish orders is a complicating factor in the organization of Polish religious care. Whereas diocesan priests recruited individually are delegated by their bishops and come under the unquestioned authority of the Mission in London, the priests from religious orders have a dual loyalty and chain of authority: on the one hand to the Polish Catholic Mission and on the other to their Superior within the order. Priests from religious orders often have a duty to contribute financially to their order, as well as to the Mission. It is not clear to what extent this duality is a source of ambiguity, confusion or embarrassment.

In the 1990s all Polish priests in England and Wales are subject to the jurisdiction of the Polish Catholic Mission, and through the Mission to the English and Polish hierarchies. (The four remaining priests in Scotland come under the aegis of the Scottish hierarchy.) In practice, however, the administration of the Polish Catholic parishes in Britain has remained largely insulated from, and independent of, the British hierarchies. Westminster Cathedral knows little of the activities of the Polish missionary church, and seems happy to allow it to go its own way. (Although there is often more contact at diocesan level, depending upon the interest of the local bishop concerned.) This means of course that unlike the situation in the United States, where ethnic parishes have been integrated into the structure of the American Roman Catholic church and 'separatism' has been frowned upon, in Britain there has been separate development. Since this has happened in response to Polish wishes, there can be no complaints from the Polish side of discrimination — for example, that there is no 'Polish bishop' in the English church.<sup>26</sup>

For administrative purposes the country is divided into four *dziekanaty* covering the North, the Midlands, the South-East and the South-West. A *dziekan* or dean is elected by parish priests within the area and thereafter acts as supervisor and liaison with the Mission, being duty-bound to visit the parishes in his region on a regular basis.<sup>27</sup> The Polish priest is a *duszpasterz* (chaplain) a word which implies ministry and vocation rather than rank and authority.<sup>28</sup> However, within the

<sup>26</sup> A. Woźnicki, 'Kościelne zagrożenie migracji', *Kultura* (Paris), 3/270 (1970), pp. 97–109.

<sup>27</sup> Tworek, *Informator Duszpasterstwa Polskiego*, pp. 46–7.

<sup>28</sup> Tworek, *Informator Duszpasterstwa Polskiego*, p. 45, paragraph 16, refers to a missionary priest or chaplain



Polish community the word *proboszcz* (parish priest) is commonly used — often in large parishes to distinguish the senior of two or more priests — even though the Polish priests' role and authority do not have a territorial basis. Since the 1940s Polish priests have had permission to create 'personal' rather than 'territorial' parishes. Based for the most part in urban centres where Poles congregated, they have been able to minister to the needs of Poles over a wider catchment area than their British counterparts.

The structure of the local 'parish' varies according to the nature of the community it serves. Bradford and Nottingham are dense and compact communities with their own churches and clubs. But many Polish communities in the provinces are smaller, more dispersed and require more travelling on the part of the priest. They are consequently more difficult to organize. Ashton, for example is a community which in 1993 had 280 parishioners listed, of whom some sixty would turn up for Sunday mass. Once a month, though, the priest travelled to outlying centres to celebrate mass at Glossop and Buxton.<sup>29</sup> There was a similar situation in Brighton where the priest celebrated mass on a weekly basis (forty to fifty people present), but then travelled to Crawley and Haywards Heath once a month. In Southampton masses are celebrated in Polish every Sunday, as they are in neighbouring Eastleigh, Bournemouth, Portsmouth and on the Isle of Wight. An interesting development here is that Polish masses on the Isle of Wight have begun since the 1980s. Until 1988 Bournemouth had only one Polish mass a month, since when it has been held weekly.<sup>30</sup> This indicates a revival in demand for mass in Polish, although it is likely that there is greater requirement for such services on the south coast only because Poles choose to live there upon retirement.

There have always been at local level parish councils (*Rady Parafialne*) which enlist lay members of the Church to help with administrative and economic matters. These have usually taken the initiative in campaigns to mobilize support — for building a new church, for example. Much social and educational activity has originated in the parish ambit and indeed the Polish chaplain is encouraged to involve himself in the life of the community. In some parishes the proliferation of group activities linked to the parish becomes quite extensive, as the diagram on page 133 illustrates.

Under the auspices of the Polish Catholic Mission, other Catholic institutions also operate. These include the Institute for Polish Catholic Action (IPAK) and the Catholic publishing enterprise 'Veritas', both of which have been in existence since the 1940s. Polish Catholic Action was established in 1947 and has local committees within the parishes. It organizes conferences on religious themes and problems, pilgrimages

29 Interview with Fr M. Jachym, Manchester, 16 September 1993.

30 Interview with Fr A. Zuziak, Southampton, 25 February 1994.

(in England these would be to the Catholic shrine at Walsingham) and is produces pamphlets and brochures.

The Polish Catholic Youth Movement (PSMK) came into existence in the 1960s and has branches in most large communities. The Mission is also responsible, through 'Veritas', for the publication of *Gazeta Niedzielna* and a number of other periodicals.

### *Other Religious Faiths*

There are few Poles of the Orthodox, Jewish or Muslim faiths remaining in Britain. There is still a small Polish Protestant (Evangelical) community in Britain, but this has declined due to assimilation, emigration and absorption into the Polish Catholic community. (Marriage to a Catholic usually means that the children are brought up in the Catholic faith. Hence 'out-marriage' for this group means not only to non-Poles, but also to Polish Catholics.)

The Protestants are grouped in the Association of Polish Evangelicals (*Zrzeszenie Ewangelików Polskich w Wielkiej Brytanii*) which was formed in 1943. There are four Protestant parishes in the country centred on London, Leeds, Cambridge and Birmingham. Each parish serves small 'satellite' communities of Protestants and all use English churches for this purpose except Leeds which has its own small church. The number of Protestants is now reduced to a few hundred. In London, where 200 people once attended services, the number during 1993 was down to around forty.<sup>31</sup>

The intriguing question arises of how easy it is to be a Polish Protestant when the overwhelming majority of Poles are Roman Catholic and in the twentieth century Catholicism has been associated with nationalism. The question is even more poignant when one realizes that most Evangelicals originate from the west of Poland, and many have German family links. On the evidence of publications such as *Posel Ewangelicki* a great deal of effort is devoted to educating fellow Poles about the contribution of Protestants to Polish history and correcting misconceptions. It is a source of pride for members of the Protestant sects themselves to learn about the great Protestant figures of Polish history and the meaning of the Reformation.<sup>32</sup>

### *The Combatants' Organizations*

The Polish settlement in Britain of the 1940s having been predominantly a military settlement, the postwar community has been steeped in the ethos of the Polish forces and their feats of arms during the war period.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Mr E. Goll, Hove, 20 January 1994; interview with Mr A. Gaś, London, 12 February 1994; '50-lecie Zrzeszenia Ewangelików Polaków w Wielkiej Brytanii', *Dziennik Polski*, 20 June 1993.

<sup>32</sup> *Jubileuszowy Biuletyn Z.E.P. (1943–1988)*, London, 1988.



Organizationally too, it was the combatants' groups which provided an early lead by enabling former comrades to remain in contact with one another and thus provided an associational 'net' and shelter from the unfamiliar society around them. This feature, of a ready-made institutional structure based on service units, was a unique feature of the Polish settlement which made it quite unlike other immigrant groups arriving in postwar Britain. In a sense though, the combatant groups' activities were only a continuation of the welfare role which the Polish forces had adopted during the war — making contributions from their pay to support the families and dependants in civilian camps.

The largest of the combatants' associations is the Polish Ex-Combatants' Association (SPK) which traces its origins back to 1945. It came into existence as a self-help organization for Polish troops being demobilized in the West. For many years the Association formed, along with the network of Polish Catholic parishes, the backbone of Polish organizational and community life in this country. During the long decades of communist rule in Poland the aims of the SPK were ideological — to propagate the idea of a free and independent Poland within the diaspora and in the international community. It waged campaigns to bring pressure on the communist authorities to return Poles from Soviet prisons, camps and exile. At the same time it campaigned to keep the crime of Katyn alive in people's minds, pressuring Western politicians to acknowledge Soviet guilt and demanding that the NKVD perpetrators be brought to justice. It attempted also to influence NATO member countries against the possible use of nuclear weapons on Polish soil.

The Association had economic, cultural and welfare goals too. In the early days it had an important role in helping Poles find employment by liaising with the Ministry of Labour. But it also attempted more direct help by setting up its own businesses such as radio repairs. A firm (PCA Ltd.) was set up as the business arm of the association to run such ventures. In the sphere of welfare the SPK was involved in extending financial aid to the sick and elderly, to invalids, widows and orphans. Finally the association had cultural aims: it supported Saturday schools, the scouting movement, dance groups, and other kinds of educational and cultural work aimed at preserving national traditions. (In 1994 the SPK contributed to the support of twenty-three Polish Saturday schools as well as choirs, sports clubs, dance groups and the Polish scouting movement.)<sup>33</sup>

The association is organized on an international basis, reflecting the fact that Polish troops migrated to many countries after the war; by no means all remained in Britain. Even as recently as December 1993 the General Assembly of the World Federation of the SPK played host to

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<sup>33</sup> A. Moszczyńska (ed.), *Polski Informator 1995–96*, 4th edn, London, 1995, p. 126.

twenty delegates from around the world.<sup>34</sup> The main administrative centre has remained in Britain and the headquarters of the association is in London (POSK). It is with the British section of the SPK that we are concerned here. Although a body created by and for old Polish soldiers, the SPK has maintained contact with British combatants' groups — most notably the British Legion.

Membership of the SPK has traditionally been open to all those who formerly served in the Polish forces — or indeed to any Pole who took part in the struggle for independence, though other combatants' groups were created for the airmen, sailors and for the Polish Home Army (AK) personnel. In theory, therefore, membership was not only open to those who had fought for the Polish cause during the 1940s but could be extended to those in the dissident and opposition movements in Poland.<sup>35</sup> Indeed in the early 1980s, against a background of membership decline, there were concrete proposals put forward that former Solidarity members arriving in Britain should be invited to join the SPK. In a bid to expand numbers and rejuvenate the association's ranks, it was argued too that membership should be extended to those members of the second generation — the sons and daughters of former combatants — who wished to join.<sup>36</sup>

Although the SPK has always seen itself as the leading voice of the combatants and through them of the Polish community in general, the decline in membership seems to have begun at an early stage. Sulik and Czaykowski wrote in 1961 that the membership of the Association 'is continually falling and at a rate which cannot be explained by natural causes: death or emigration'. Their figures showed that the number of local groups had fallen from 202 to 111. Over the same period the number of members had fallen from 14,510 in 1951 to 6454 in 1960 — a drop of more than half. The authors estimated that this was less than 6 per cent of the number of Poles in Great Britain.<sup>37</sup> By 1984 though there were 7866 members according to the Association's figures. Surprisingly perhaps, in the London area, where the greatest concentration of Poles is found, only 2 per cent were members.<sup>38</sup> This may reflect the relative strength of other forms of organized social life in the Polish community — in particular around the parishes. But it

<sup>34</sup> *Dziennik Polski*, 11 December 1993: report of the 15th Assembly of the SPK World Federation.

<sup>35</sup> The 1976 statute of the SPK World Federation provided for the following categories of membership (Article III, Para 2): 'a) each soldier or former soldier of the Polish Armed Forces. b) any Pole who takes part in the struggle of the Emigration for the independence of Poland. c) any citizen of the Republic who took part in the struggle for the independence of Poland. d) the statute of a country SPK may anticipate membership of the SPK for people not included under a, b and c.'

<sup>36</sup> SPK brochure, '45 lat służby Polsce i Emigracji', dated November 1984.

<sup>37</sup> B. Czaykowski and B. Sulik, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, pp. 405–6.

<sup>38</sup> '45 lat służby Polsce i Emigracji' (as note 36).



probably also indicates how large a proportion of Poles in the capital are more recent arrivals. In the past decade there is little evidence that there has been a significant degree of 'take-up' of membership either on the part of newcomers from Poland, or from the second generation. The 1994 figure is claimed to be 7500 but is probably overstated for reasons that will be explained below.<sup>39</sup>

The membership is organized on a local basis into a *koło* (circle or group) and these in turn are grouped within regions. In 1984 the membership was organized into ninety-three local groups and twelve regions. (The 1994 figure was down to eighty-eight groups.) Reports from regional conferences and local SPK meetings appear regularly in the *Polish Daily*. The meeting of No. 11 region (Scotland), reported in the press during August 1994, showed that there were 780 members of the SPK in Scotland as a whole. However such figures need to be treated with caution. The Falkirk figure of 114 included fifty-four women!<sup>40</sup> It seems that this number must include members' wives — most of whom are Scottish! It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the non-Polish members of combatants' clubs are also being included in some returns.

The estate (*majątek*) of the SPK is now considerable and amounts to hundreds of thousands of pounds, if not millions. It has some twenty-seven Combatants' Clubs (*Domy Kombatanta*) around the country, most of which are run on a local basis but with close supervision from the central authorities.<sup>41</sup> The main problem facing the SPK in the 1990s is the viability of many of its clubs. In recent years clubs in Coventry, Dundee and Perth have closed. It seems that others are destined to follow. One of the problems is finding people willing to take responsibility for their running. Most are no longer 'Polish clubs' in the true sense, since they depend on bar profits from a non-Polish clientele to survive. Another source of revenue for the clubs — those which are in better locations — is by renting out premises for (again, mainly non-Polish) wedding receptions, parties and other celebrations. During a visit to the SPK Club in Luton, in the summer of 1993 the club chairman listed the forthcoming events: 'Friday: Lonely Hearts' Club; Saturday: Wedding (hall hired out); Sunday: Country Music evening'. As the club chairman pointed out to me, it would be impossible to keep most Polish clubs going without such relaxed rules; few of the surviving Polish combatants could come to the club regularly. Some were housebound, most could no longer drink the quantities they had been used to in their youth; some were taking medicines which prevented them drinking at all. There are a few Polish entertainments which would draw Poles to the Club in large numbers but the chairman was

<sup>39</sup> This figure is taken from the *Polski Informator* 1995–96, p. 126.

<sup>40</sup> *Dziennik Polski*, 9 August 1994.

<sup>41</sup> *Kalendarzyk Kombatanta* 1995, London, 1994, pp. 117–18

pessimistic about the club's future. Without help for the elderly committee he estimated that it would fold within five or ten years.<sup>42</sup>

It is ironic to consider that these venues, which were established to provide an informal setting where Poles could come together and relax in a familiar Polish environment, surrounded by friends, are now being maintained by the bar profits which accrue from the very people the earlier generation of Poles were seeking refuge from. The ethnic barriers have collapsed in the face of financial realities. However the danger of being 'swamped' and taken over by British members has been anticipated and guarded against. There are two categories of club membership — 'voting' for the Poles and 'non-voting' for the British. This ensures that the clubs remain under Polish control.<sup>43</sup>

All the clubs run by the SPK are controlled by its business arm, the PCA Ltd., and local clubs contribute half their profits to the central SPK. There is some evidence that in the past tension existed between PCA-appointed club managers and the local SPK groups.<sup>44</sup> I have no knowledge of whether this is still present. The central accounting authorities keep a very close watch on the financial viability of clubs for which they are responsible — closer even, it is suggested, than the Polish Catholic Mission's supervision of parish affairs. Books are checked regularly and budgets set for the following year. This control and management style is sometimes resented by the rank and file in the provinces. Questions have also been raised about the 'limited company' status of the PCA; if it had charitable status, critics suggested, the clubs would save thousands of pounds in local authority rates. The 'redistributive' role of the Central SPK — taking funds from 'successful' (wealthy) groups or clubs and investing them in the smaller, less dynamic, ones — has also been queried.

At the end of 1992 a report on the activities of the Polish club in Manchester carried an appeal for the central authorities not to block a refurbishment plan.<sup>45</sup> The fear was expressed that the central SKP wished to close down this 'bastion of Polishness' in the North-West. Charges from the central authorities were that financial mismanagement needed to be corrected. The Manchester example highlights the dilemma facing many clubs. It is based in a rambling old church structure in

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Mr Nowak, Luton, 16 September 1993.

<sup>43</sup> In the course of my travels to different Polish communities, one aggrieved English husband in the Midlands pointed to the anomaly that as a result of these discriminatory measures, his son could become a full member of the local Polish Club whereas he himself could not!

<sup>44</sup> Czaykowski and Sulik, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, p. 410.

<sup>45</sup> J. Strutynski, 'Chmury nad Manchesterem', *Dziennik Polski*, 31 December 1992. The 'conflict', or difference of opinion, between Manchester and the central authorities of the SPK seems to have a long pedigree. Czaykowski and Sulik mention differences over the amount of money that Manchester was to devote to rebuilding the club in the late 1950s, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, pp. 409–10.



Moss Side. Its location in one of the less salubrious of the city's districts acts as a disincentive to Poles to frequent the place. It has the drabness and down at heel atmosphere that characterizes so many of the clubs — a minimalist decor which the older generation may have been happy to tolerate but the younger generation, accustomed to smarter, brighter club and pub surroundings, are not.<sup>46</sup>

In 1984 Manchester, with 600 members, was the largest SPK group in the country. By 1992 the figure had fallen to 315. In the summer of 1993 the noticeboard at the entrance to the Manchester club held an appeal:

In considering the future of the SPK in Manchester the present council has decided to appeal to the generation born here (in Britain) and to the young people who have arrived from Poland that they will involve themselves in the work of the Association and continue the fine activity and traditions of their fathers, who, because of age, are finding this work increasingly difficult.<sup>47</sup>

This notice echoes the message that is coming from many such centres from Luton to Kirkaldy, that the younger generation (apart from isolated exceptions) are not interested in taking over the mantle and running clubs for which they see little future.

Since the collapse of communism, the ideological role of the SPK has ended, links have been established with the homeland and its representatives, and the Association has been involved in a number of major commemorative events. These included the triumphal return to Poland of combatants from around the world in August 1992 — an assembly which marked a formal reunion with comrades in the homeland and which was held at Warsaw and Częstochowa under the patronage of President Wałęsa. Then two years later in 1994 came commemorative events surrounding the battles of the Second World War in which Polish troops were engaged, including Falaise, Monte Cassino, Bologna, Arnhem and the Warsaw Rising. Yet despite the return of democracy to Poland the SPK does not see its work as completed.

While acknowledging with pleasure the restoration of freedom and democracy in Poland, the SPK does not see the necessity of submitting itself to Warsaw control, insisting on maintaining organizational and

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<sup>46</sup> One member of the younger Polish generation began his attempt to summarize the feelings of the younger generation towards these clubs: 'Let us look for a moment through their eyes at certain Polish clubs and social centres in London and the provinces. In their style and ambience they frequently remind one of the messrooms in camp barracks...', W. Moszczyński, 'Nasza przyszłość w naszych rękach', *Tydzień Polski*, 8 August 1992.

<sup>47</sup> The Polish original read as follows: 'Z myślą o przyszłość SPK w Manchesterze obecny Zarząd postanowił zwrócić się z apelem do pokolenia tutaj urodzonego i młodzieży przybyłej z Kraju aby włączyła się w pracę Stowarzyszenia i kontynuowała piękną działalność i tradycje ojców, którym z powodu wieku praca ta przychodzi coraz trudniej.'

financial independence.<sup>48</sup> It is pledged to continue the work of fostering Polish language and culture among the younger generations and also sending aid to ethnic Poles in the former Soviet republics. Recent political events in the homeland (the 1993 elections which returned the former communists to government) have been viewed with a certain ambivalence on the part of the SPK, as well as amongst the general run of Poles in Britain. While they must respect the choice of the Polish electorate, the Combatants have been dismayed by the new government's attempts to 'sweep under the carpet' past crimes committed by the communist security forces. They have condemned proposals to allow former members of the security apparatus — people involved in brutally suppressing opposition to communist rule and Soviet domination up to the 1980s — the rights of combatants under Polish law.<sup>49</sup>

Of other combatants' groups, the most prominent is the Airmens' Association (*Stowarzyszenie Lotników*) with its clubs in South Kensington, Nottingham and Blackpool. It is questionable though how long it can remain in existence given its declining membership. The Airmens' Association, unlike the SPK, has refused to accept younger members into its ranks and so has rejected the move towards regeneration of its sister organization. It is unlikely that it will be able to prolong its existence more than a decade or two. The Naval Association (*Stowarzyszenie Marynarzy*) was dissolved in 1992, having first disposed of its residential home on the Hove seafront. Other combatants' organizations still functioning include the Home Army Association (*Koło AK*), the Union of War Invalids (*Związek Inwalidów Wojennych PSZ*) and the Women Soldiers' Group (*Koło Kobiet Żołnierzy PSZ*). Many unit associations too still keep former comrades in touch with one another.

### *Cultural Institutions*

#### *The Polish Social and Cultural Centre (POSK)*

POSK is more than a building; it is a meeting place and a centre of Polish culture and research which attracts thousands of people from the London area, the provinces, from Poland and from other branches of the Polish diaspora. In 1994 POSK had 10,000 members and it was

<sup>48</sup> Comments by C. Zychowicz at 35th Assembly of the SPK in Great Britain, 2–3 July 1994, Fenton, Lincs. Reported in *Dziennik Polski*, 26 July 1994.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. Also *Dziennik Polski*, 11 December 1993: report of the 15th Assembly of the SPK World Federation. In the Assembly's Declaration the final points were included in a letter to Prime Minister Pawlak. The last point stated that the Assembly '... demands the authorities of the Polish Republic to punish those representatives of the communist regime guilty of crimes committed against citizens fighting for a free, sovereign and socially just Poland...'.



estimated that some 2000 people used the centre each week.<sup>50</sup> The various clubs, associations and institutes which the building houses (and which are represented within the organizational structure of POSK) extend their membership and influence far beyond the confines of a single west London borough. Finally, the drive to create POSK — to build a major centre of Polish social and cultural life — involved the whole of the community and not just a narrow, geographically defined section of it.

The construction of POSK involved a campaign of community mobilization unparalleled within the Polish community before or since, and it has probably not been equalled in any of the ethnic communities which established themselves in Britain in recent times. Poles share a folk image of themselves as being often too egocentric to co-operate harmoniously on joint endeavours. Perhaps for this reason the sense of wonder felt at their achievement is eloquently captured in the title of the book which summarized the first twenty-five years of the existence of POSK — *Miracle on the Thames*.<sup>51</sup> The campaign was aimed ultimately at creating a large, modern, purpose-built structure which would provide a home for many Polish associations, as well as recreational facilities for young and old alike.

The initiative to create a centre of Polish culture was not without its opponents and provoked an intense public debate. Meetings took place to discuss the plan in public and in private. Much discussion was conducted through the organs of the press — chiefly the *Polish Daily*. Questions were asked about the overall costs involved, and whether such a centre would have a use or purpose in future years, given the inevitability of eventual assimilation. Some prominent individuals had different ideas of the way in which the community should be organized and community resources directed. Some were cautious of what they considered the rather naive optimism of the more ardent POSK supporters.<sup>52</sup> In order to counter rumour and hostile propaganda, the POSK leadership issued a *Komunikat Informacyjny* (news-sheet, later a 'bulletin') from the first months of its existence. It was edited by the organization's secretariat and provided a direct line of communication to members of the Polish community, informing them about the progress of POSK and how their donated money was being spent.

Interestingly, one source of determined opposition was the political camp (*Zamek* or 'castle') centred on the president and government in exile. One can only speculate on the reasons for such opposition. The plan to build POSK was a large-scale initiative, an exercise in

<sup>50</sup> *Dziennik Polski*, 26 August 1994. The article from which these figures are taken commemorates thirty years since the creation of POSK as an organization and the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the building for public use.

<sup>51</sup> J. Garliński, *Cud nad Tamizą. 25 lat Polskiego Ośrodka Społeczno-Kulturalnego w Wielkiej Brytanii*, London, 1989.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

community mobilization in which the émigré political authorities were not formally involved — they were in fact sidelined and marginalized. It would not have been surprising if they felt resentful and jealous. But also, for an older group of political activists whose eyes were turned very much towards Poland and the past, it was difficult even after two decades to reconcile oneself to the idea of putting down roots, of building a future for one's children and grandchildren outside the 'homeland'.

In deciding where to locate the new centre, planners had in mind proximity to areas of Polish residential concentration in the capital as well as to lines of communication. But in their initial approaches to borough leaders, the Poles were astonished to discover that they were not welcomed with open arms. The first attempts were made in the borough of Kensington and Chelsea, an area which had many wartime links with the Polish community and in which some of POSK's existing properties were located. However, Kensington and other boroughs were unwilling to entertain the idea of a large Polish cultural centre in their 'backyard'. Ealing, site of the densest and most numerous Polish settlement, was ruled out as being too distant from the centre.

They eventually settled on Hammersmith where the borough council had adopted a more friendly, welcoming attitude. (Hammersmith had the advantage too that its local rates and water charges were cheaper than in neighbouring Kensington.) The only remaining problem was to find a suitable site. In the spring of 1968 a site was found in King Street — just opposite the Latymer Upper boys' school — with a warehouse and two adjoining buildings for sale. The location was close to several lines of communication with Ravenscourt Park tube station round the corner, main bus routes passing along King Street, and the beginning of the M4 motorway little more than a stone's throw away. The buildings were bought, as was a neighbouring Baptist Church which became available at the same time. On 6 March 1971 Bishop (later Cardinal) Rubin, responsible for the pastoral care of the Polish diaspora, blessed the foundation stone and the following October building work at last began.

The campaign to build POSK is an interesting case study for the historian of the ethnic community, providing a classic example of community mobilization in pursuit of a common goal. If one were to ask why the Poles thought the whole burdensome process worth the effort to begin with, the need to look to the future and start planning for an existence beyond and apart from that of political opposition to the regime in Poland was certainly an important factor. Ironically, though, the community would probably not have felt such a strong need for a centre had it not been for ideological reasons cut off from the mainsprings of the homeland culture.

The campaign was marked by appeals to national sentiment and group loyalty. Like many 'mobilizing' campaigns at local level — for



example, to raise funds for church-building — divisions arose over the wisdom of the overall plan and the course to be followed. Such divisions are common and often reflect pre-existing personal antagonisms and rivalries. But the campaign achieved importance as a point around which to focus community aims — a well-practised technique at all levels of the ethnic community. The question of national pride, a determination to show their British hosts (apparent especially when the future of the Polish Library was threatened) that they were capable of acting in harmony also played a part. Also, perhaps, there was a desire to emulate other minority communities — postwar immigrant communities from the New Commonwealth which had arrived in the 1950s and enjoyed a much higher profile. Poles had kept their heads down — in part, of course, because their attention was focused on the homeland. They felt a need to reassert themselves, to erect a monument, while at the same time creating something which would be a source of community pride and would help to 'bind in' the younger elements.

A further aspect of the POSK campaign which is found in the fund-raising efforts within the Polish community, is the element of publicity or display. Fund-raising at local level or even for wider community schemes usually involves publishing the name of the contributor and the amount contributed for the information of the community at large. This may be done in the *Polish Daily* or in parish bulletins. In this way one can be sure that one's generosity is brought to the knowledge of friends and acquaintances. Equally, one can check on the degree of generosity shown by others. The process introduces an element of 'display' for members of the community, but it also introduces elements of competition and social pressure to contribute. This has its benefits for the fund-raisers, of course. This is inherent in the POSK 'founders' scheme' — the commemoration of one's generosity via a fixed tablet or plate for future generations to see. It involves immortalization of a kind.

A further interesting aspect of the drive to build POSK is the emerging importance of the second generation. The participation of younger members of the community has increased to a point where, at the time of writing (April 1994), twenty members of the fifty-strong Council are of the generation born outside Poland. Some of these 'youngsters' (many of whom are now middle-aged) have been involved in the POSK campaign since the early 1970s. Their particular skills and expertise, and their greater confidence in dealing with British officialdom and business contacts have played a great part in the success of POSK.

POSK today provides a home to a variety of Polish institutions and associations. Perhaps foremost among them is the Polish Library which by December 1992 could boast over 166,000 books concerning Polish affairs, several hundred manuscripts, 40,000 photographs and more

than 5000 periodical titles.<sup>53</sup> It is unparalleled as a resource built up by a minority group in this country and serves three communities: the Polish diaspora, the British community (with queries on Poland and Polish culture), and Poland itself in the form of visiting scholars. The Library has always depended on voluntary work from helpers and on charitable donations from the community. In the postwar period the Library developed an almost unique role as a repository of émigré literature and also of works on Poles in the 'East' (the Soviet Union). Its importance has been underlined since 1989 by the number of distinguished visitors which have included the Polish Primate, Cardinal Glemp, the former Prime Minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and the President, Lech Wałęsa.

The Polish theatre in POSK remains active despite fears for its health and future. Productions mounted included those put on by local groups and also by visiting companies from Poland. Most of course are Polish plays and reviews, although the POSK theatre has staged several successful translations of English comedies and farces. Children's plays are also staged. The reservoir of acting talent for such productions was dwindling by the 1970s. One of the few famous acting talents to emerge from the Polish community was Rula Lenska, well-known from her appearances on British television. But in the 1980s a number of actors settled in London as a result of martial law in Poland. Recent Polish stage and screen actors who have appeared in POSK include Krystyna Janda, Wojciech Pszoniak and Zbigniew Zapasiewicz.

The management, aware of the contribution to the building of POSK made by Poles outside London, has attempted to involve Poles from the provinces in the Centre's cultural activities. Hence, coach-party trips to the Polish theatre from communities in Swindon or Leicester are subsidized.

POSK is also home to a Polish bookshop, an art gallery, a cafe and a restaurant. It houses the Polish University Abroad (PUNO), the seminars of which take place in its rooms. It is the headquarters of many organizations including the SPK and the Federation. Since the political transformation in Poland, the winding up of the government in exile and the sale of the *Zamek* (the Eaton Place property which had been the seat of the government in exile since the war), POSK has assumed a new position as the nerve centre of community leadership. It has seen the emergence of *Interes* and the Polish Business Centre, and has welcomed major figures from the world of business, politics and finance in Poland as well as from the world of culture.

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<sup>53</sup> *Biuletyn POSK*, vol. 16, no. 90, October–November 1992. In December 1992 an agreement was signed to merge the library of the Sikorski Institute with the Polish Library — a process of consolidation which was unavoidable given the resources needed to maintain two such libraries in London. *Dziennik Polski*, 21 January 1993.



### *Polish Hearth Club*

POSK, although of great symbolic importance, is not by any means the sole repository of Polish social and cultural life. The Polish Hearth Club (*Ognisko*) in Kensington has attracted Poles to its premises since the war years. Situated opposite Imperial College it cultivates an aura of pre-war elegance and style. Its restaurant was for years a favoured venue for the émigré elite: in its heyday major political and literary figures were a common sight there. The Anglo-Polish Conservative Society still meets there. But it has also played host to theatrical productions and art exhibitions.<sup>54</sup> *Ognisko* has, however, suffered both from its own aura of exclusiveness and from the emergence of POSK as a much more accessible centre, and one more open to the young. At the beginning of 1994 questions were raised in the Polish press over the future of an institution which was increasingly taking on the characteristics of a white elephant — it had a growing financial deficit and was suffering from the gradual disappearance of its clientele.

### *Sikorski Institute*

The Sikorski Institute, overlooking London's Hyde Park, is another of the jewels of the Polish emigracja and one that has existed since the 1940s. It is, to give it its full title, the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum. The Museum contains a rich store of military memorabilia, much of which dates from the Second World War. But the Institute also houses an archive. Virtually all of the files of the wartime Polish government in exile are held here, and so it is a magnet for historians from Poland and further afield who are interested in the history of this tragic period.<sup>55</sup>

### *The Polish Saturday School Movement*

The aims of the Saturday school movement are to help pupils acquire an insight into the culture and traditions of their parents' (or grandparents') homeland; to help them to understand how and why their parents (or grandparents) left their homeland and settled in Britain; to enable them to formulate a viable sense of self-identity; and to enable them to pass examinations in the minority language and increase their academic qualifications.<sup>56</sup> Implicitly, a large part of the school's aims are geared towards instilling a sense of pride in Polish history and

<sup>54</sup> *Polish Hearth Club. Commemorative Issue. 1940–1992*, London, n.d.

<sup>55</sup> W. Milewski, A. Suchcitz, A. Gorzycki, *Guide to the Archives of the Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum*, vol. 1, London, 1985.

<sup>56</sup> See H.J. Rajchel, 'Pupils' Needs and Curriculum Development in a Supplementary School', MEd dissertation, Nottingham Trent University, 1993, p. 2.

traditions, and along with that a sense of self-esteem and pride in one's Polish roots.

Since the high point of the 1970s there has been a decline in the number of pupils attending the schools. This was perhaps inevitable as the assimilation process gathered pace. But what was less explicable was why a number of schools should begin to register an increase in numbers from the late 1980s into the 1990s. Some teachers have attributed it to the arrival of more 'third-generation' Poles (i.e. the grandchildren of the original émigrés) in Polish schools, the result of a small 'baby boom' within the ethnic community. Yet others have drawn attention to the issue of motivation. Many of the emigrants of the 1960s onwards were turning their back on Poland once and for all, not expecting to return to a country they expected to remain under communist rule for their lifetime. Now the changed political and economic landscape in Poland is seen as providing opportunities there for Polish speakers. By 1993 there were sixty-four schools throughout Great Britain registered with the central authorities in London. But these ranged in size from those with over a hundred pupils such as Manchester, Balham and Ealing (which had some 350) to those with a dozen or less. The Polish school in Maidstone had eight children, that in Bournemouth had twelve pupils, while in Dursley (Gloucestershire) a school of five pupils and two teachers was listed. There has been a steady closure of schools although a greater stabilization has been seen over the past decade than in the previous two.<sup>57</sup>

The Manchester Polish school at one time attracted youngsters from the peripheral communities (Bolton, Preston, Stockport) which had their own Polish schools, but sent their children to the metropolitan 'centre' for O-level and A-level courses. These schools in the outlying communities have for the most part closed down, and now only a small number of children are brought in to attend the Manchester school. But the process of closure is not irreversible and from time to time — perhaps due to the arrival of some energetic or motivated parent — an attempt will be made to revive an old school or initiate a new one. The school in Milford (Surrey) which had earlier closed, was reopened and in 1993 had twenty pupils.

What is taught at the Polish Saturday school? In its original conception during the 1950s the Polish school often took up a whole day. The morning was occupied with more academic classroom subjects such as Polish language and literature, history and geography and religion — for which the parish priest (*proboszcz*) was usually responsible. But 'school' often continued after lunch with 'non-academic' activities such as folk-singing and dance, or scouting. In the

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<sup>57</sup> In the summer of 1994 a note in the *Polish Daily* informed readers that the Polish school in Ashton was closing down. The school had fourteen pupils. *Dziennik Polski*, 11 August 1994.



course of time these latter activities separated off and became optional activities for children and young people.

At present the school day for most Polish pupils lasts from 9 a.m. to midday or to 1 p.m., that is, between three and four hours. There is one break at least during the session and often two, during which children may let off steam, eat snacks or visit the 'tuck shop'. The subject matter of lessons depends to a large extent on the age of the pupils, and most of the larger schools have nursery classes taking children as young as four years. However, in its early decades the aim was to follow the pattern of Polish secondary education during the pre-war period, both as regards the organization of classes and (with some limitations) the curriculum followed. This is now impossible since the level of spoken and written Polish of most pupils is inadequate for such a task.

One of the advantages of the schools (a 'selling-point' to both pupils and parents) is that they prepare children in the higher classes for GCSE Polish (formerly O-level) and the A-level examination. It is believed by parents and pupils that possession of such qualifications places the children at an advantage in applying for college and university. The numbers of pupils entering for both examinations was falling until the late 1980s, a sign of declining language proficiency.<sup>58</sup>

Who are the teachers and what motivates them? The teaching staff of the Polish schools in the postwar decades may be divided into three or four categories. In the first place there are those members of the 1940s settlement who gained teaching qualifications in Poland before the war, or who attended teacher-training courses organized in exile. The older members in this category were employed as teachers in pre-war Poland, but few of these people are still active. Some managed to overcome the language barrier and acquire jobs within the British educational system. But all were driven to commit time and effort to the Polish school by deep patriotism and commitment to the Polish cause.

The second category are teachers born outside Poland, brought up in Britain and, in most cases, themselves the product of the Saturday school system. Many feel a sense that having themselves benefited from the sacrifices of others, it is now their turn to put something back into the community. Again, many of this category are 'professionals'; that is, they are teachers within the British educational system. This is both an advantage and a disadvantage. On the one hand it has led to the desire to introduce more modern teaching methods into the school (as contrasted with the rather dated didactic methods used by teachers of the older generation), but in the past there has been resistance and acrimony at attempts to introduce change.

The third category comprises more recent arrivals, those coming from Poland in the late 1950s and after. Most of this category are women (a minority are men) who have married into the community, or

<sup>58</sup> T. Radzik, *Szkolnictwo polskie w Wielkiej Brytanii po drugiej wojnie światowej*, Lublin, 1991, p. 236.

married British partners and involved themselves in Polish community activity. They are generally well educated (many to university level) and their Polish is 'fresher'. Also, many are the parents of the children then going through the schools. In some schools by the 1970s and 1980s this category comprised a majority of teachers. By the 1990s, with the retirement or death of many senior figures, some had become school heads (for example in Coventry, Slough and Leicester).

The teachers have their own 'union' or professional association, the Association of Polish Teachers Abroad (*Zrzeszenie Nauczycielstwa Polskiego Zagranicą* — ZNPG) which collaborates with the Polish Educational Society in organizing regional teachers' conferences and in publishing ventures. An annual teachers' conference is held at the University of London, and the same venue is used to host conferences for Polish A-level students from around the country.

The Polish Educational Society Abroad (*Polska Macierz Szkolna* — PMS) was revived in the early 1950s in order to consolidate this growth and provide guidance and help in matters of curriculum, textbook provision, liaison and so on.<sup>59</sup> The Society is responsible for the administration of eight regional inspectorates, which help monitor schools' progress. It plays no role in the running of schools and does not, for example, appoint heads or intervene in local disputes. Nor does it 'pay' schools or their members. Since 1989 the PMS has been able to co-operate with Polish agencies (Embassy, Consulate, Cultural Institute) whereas before the political changes in Poland it adopted the stern, implacable line of the *emigracja* and refused to have any contact whatsoever with communist Poland. In fact, it has established a co-operative relationship with the State University of Lublin (UMCS) over the question of textbook provision.<sup>60</sup>

The schools then are almost entirely autonomous, although there is a degree of monitoring and control at local level. Most schools have a school committee or a parents' committee which oversees school affairs and usually acts as a fund-raising body. The schools are generally self-supporting. Parents contribute a certain termly or annual sum per child. In 1994 the average was about £2.00 per child per Saturday. Other funds are raised by collections and fund-raising activities by the parents'

<sup>59</sup> The Polish Educational Society Abroad was founded in Warsaw in 1905, its aim being to continue the teaching of Polish under the Russian partition. Its first chairman was the novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz, known to Western audiences for his 'Quo Vadis' (transformed into a Hollywood film) but better known to Polish schoolchildren for his cycle of Polish historical novels. The PMS was reactivated in Britain in 1953 by Józef Swiatkowski with the aim of taking under its wing Polish schools abroad. By 1994 the PMS catered for some 200 outposts in thirty-one countries and was becoming involved in extending its activities to Polish communities in Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. K. Janota-Bzowska, 'O przyszłości języka polskiego na uchodźstwie', *Dziennik Polski*, 7 April 1994.

<sup>60</sup> E. Wątróbska, 'Umiejętności językowe dzieci polonijnych', MA thesis, Instytut Języka Polskiego, University of Warsaw, 1993.



committee. But outgoings are not usually high. Teaching is regarded as voluntary, although most schools allow their staff small sums to cover travel expenses. The largest expense can be rental, if English school premises have to be hired from the local education authority.

Since the 1970s, however, there has been a sea change in the attitude of local authorities to ethnic minority supplementary teaching. Education authorities are now much more likely to support such schools by allowing the Polish community to use a local English school at a nominal rent or even free of charge. In Slough during the late 1970s the Polish community used classrooms on the ground floor of a local secondary school, while the rooms on the upper floor were used by the Italian community for their school. Nottingham is a case in point where relations between county education authorities and the Polish community are extremely cordial. Not only does the Polish school use English school premises without charge, but the local authority makes an annual grant available to the Polish school.<sup>61</sup>

It is a sad irony that as British society has become more tolerant and even more supportive of ethnic minority schooling, questions over the long-term viability of Polish schools in their present form have been rising from within the community. Increasingly since the 1970s children coming to Polish school are not 'native speakers' in the sense that their parents were. The language of the home is English and many teachers are aware that the four hours or so the children spend in Polish school is their only real contact with the language from one weekend to the next. This means that whereas in earlier days, teachers could assume a basic knowledge of Polish vocabulary and grammar — school was for instruction in reading, writing and literature — now such assumptions cannot be made. The suggestion has been made that most subjects at Saturday school will soon have to be taught in English, with Polish being taught as a foreign language — in much the same way that children learn French, German or Spanish at the English school.

The earlier generations of children heard only Polish at home, and most started at their British schools knowing little or no English. They and their families were part of much more cohesive and tightly knit communities, with a higher degree of social inter-dependence and greater conformative pressures. They would be surrounded by Polish for much of their waking life, in social situations outside school. And at this time, it was a matter of communicating in Polish with elderly relatives or not at all.

The generation now attending Polish school are composed of three groups. In the main, they are the second generation to be born in this country — the grandchildren of the 1940s exiles. Their parents were Saturday school pupils, but have grown up and been educated within British society. Inevitably then the parents' facility in English is greater

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<sup>61</sup> T. Radzik, *Szkolnictwo polskie w Wielkiej Brytanii*, p. 209.

than in Polish. Many parents, despite a Polish upbringing, have had only the odd visit or two to Poland — usually as children. They will acknowledge that the language of the home is English.

The second group consists of those who have a parent, usually the mother, born in Poland. The second parent is usually born in Britain and may be of non-Polish background. Hence the appearance of typically English names (Black, Dorratt, Cresswell) on Polish school rolls since the 1970s. The quality of their Polish varies with the interest and determination of the Polish spouse to maintain it and speak it in the home.

A third category are those children, most of whom live in the South-East, both of whose parents were born in Poland. In London, there is a higher percentage of children of newly arrived Poles (post-Solidarity influx) now attending schools.<sup>62</sup> This means on one level a raising of standards, but it also means that the differences in ability between children in the same age group may be considerable — a problem the teachers of earlier decades did not have to face to such a degree.

### *The Polish Scouting Movement*

The most popular Polish youth activity in Britain in the postwar period — apart from the Saturday schools — has been the Polish scouting movement, formally the Association of Polish Scouts (ZHP). The ZHP in Britain is part of a world-wide Polish scouting movement which flourished in the diaspora communities after 1945 but which for political reasons had no contact with the homeland.<sup>63</sup>

The ZHP is therefore a continuation of the scouting movement which flourished in Poland between the wars but it has been refashioned by conditions of exile. The Polish scouts inherited not only a fierce sense of patriotism from the pre-war generation of instructors, but were shaped too by the events of the 1940s. They formed a body which, like the combatants' associations and other political exile institutions, was strongly opposed to communist rule in the homeland. It took on therefore ideological trappings.

In the postwar decades a curious relationship developed between the Polish scouting movement abroad and the World Scouting bodies (for

<sup>62</sup> In the course of a conference for A-level Polish candidates held at the University of London on 21 March 1992, a questionnaire was handed out to participants. Of the seventy-four young people who replied 70 per cent had fathers who had been born in Poland and 78 per cent had mothers born in Poland. More than half (64 per cent) had both parents born in Poland. There is an element of self-fulfilment or circularity about these figures of course, since these are the very category of children whose Polish we might expect to be more developed and therefore more likely to opt to take the A-level examination.

<sup>63</sup> R.K. Daszkiewicz, *Harcerstwo polskie poza granicami kraju (od zarania do 1930 roku w relacjach i dokumentach)*, Lublin, 1983.



scouts and guides). Although officially not recognized, informal contacts were established. This had its uses for both sides. On the one hand the World Bureau was able to take soundings about the situation of scouting in Poland on which it had few other sources of information. Meanwhile the ZHP was eager to keep itself and its cause in the 'public eye', so to speak.

Today the Polish Scouts and Guides movement is an international movement with over three thousand members worldwide. It has affiliated bodies in the United States, Canada, Argentina, South Africa, Australia, France, Germany, Austria and Sweden. In Britain, as elsewhere, it is supported by fund-raising activities and a separate organization, the Circle of Friends of Scouting (KPH) — composed for the most part of parents and former scouts — is active in supporting the movement. The ZHP did not in the past receive funds from the government in exile, and of course it receives no subventions from the British government or local authorities. Nevertheless the Polish scouting movement in Great Britain has flourished to the extent that it now has two impressive hostels-cum-camping-grounds, one at St Briavels on the Welsh border and the other at Fenton near Lincoln. It is here that regional and national meetings, assemblies and jamborees take place.

The oath sworn by new members is as follows: 'I have a sincere desire to devote my life to the service of God and Poland, to help my neighbours willingly and to obey the Scouting Law.'<sup>64</sup> A further note (5c) points out that in the countries of settlement there may be, if the need arises, an additional sentence in the oath concerning loyalty to the country in question. The oath encapsulates the emphasis upon Christian principles and dedication to the Polish cause. In the Statute there is provision for a Polish priest or *kapelan* to be present in each local *drużyna* (troop) in order to ensure that the basis of Christian faith is maintained. Higher up the organization, in the larger units, this function becomes obligatory.

The stated aim of the movement is to prepare young people for 'conscious, active and selfless service to Poland and the Polish people'. It has therefore an educational role in instilling values of citizenship, environmental awareness and patriotism conveyed through meetings, games, outings, camps and fireside sing-songs and so on. Questioned as to what was more important — the scouting values or the Polish patriotic message — a senior instructress put it replied:

We tend to feel that we are bringing up [*wychowanie*] citizens of the world, people who are prepared to go out into the world armed to take decisions of that sort. And secondly to be able to be useful to the community in which they live. And the Polishness is just one other dimension to that.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> ZHP, *Regulamin Główny*, 1989, p. 4. (My translation. K.S.)

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Teresa Ciecierska (London), 26 September 1994.

Children can become members at an early age, there being separate categories of cub scouts or *zuchy* (seven to eleven-year-olds) and junior cubs or *skrzaty* (the under-sevens). Many remain involved into adulthood as instructors and senior scouts. It is important to remember though that, as the instructress quoted above pointed out: 'We are an elitist organization'. By this she meant that the organization is only open to Polish speakers. Polish is used at all meetings and camps, and of course is essential for international gatherings of the ZHP where it is the only common language. Naturally this requirement means that with the decline in numbers of Polish speakers among the third generation, fewer young people are becoming Polish scouts.

In a number of centres faced with declining numbers there have been attempts to conduct meetings in English — with Polish translation — because a majority of the children did not understand Polish sufficiently. But this tactic holds other dangers. As in the Saturday schools it tends to 'short-change' the children from Polish-speaking households, whose parents take care that they speak Polish in the home. The whole purpose in sending such children to Polish scouts is for them to have a Polish social activity, and this is being denied them if the language of the meetings is changed to English.

There is a further aspect of Polish scouting which needs clarification. Its activities bring forth great praise and enthusiasm from current and former members, especially the camps and educational activities. However, equally there are those for whom the very military style of the movement is not to their taste. The uniforms (especially the military-style forage caps), ranks (quartermaster for camp) and activities all have a military flavour. Many informants referred to the amount of 'drill' that was part and parcel of Polish scouting — standing in line and marching to music. 'It was', as one said, 'obviously ex-Army people organizing it'. But much of the style and success of the scouting movement depends on the local leadership and their enthusiasm and talent in dealing with young people.

The following table shows the decline in membership over the past thirty years; as can be seen, the numbers reached a peak at the end of the 1960s since when there has been a gradual decline which has only partially slowed in the course of the 1970s.<sup>66</sup>

Many members of the scouting movement give anecdotal evidence of this decline. According to one, in the early 1950s there were five cub groups in Nottingham, each of which had between thirty and forty children. By 1993 there was one group of twenty-five.<sup>67</sup> Numbers dropped by almost a half over the country as a whole but the regional picture is more significant. The Scout and Guide (Girl Scout) movements are divided (independently) into regions, and then further

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<sup>66</sup> Statistics in this section come from materials provided by Mr L. Kliszewicz.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Mr T. Stenzel (Melton Mowbray), 17 September 1993.



into individual districts and troops. The Boy Scouts currently have six regions, all named after Polish cities. More than half the scouts (55 per cent) are registered with the London and South regions. The Girl Scouts are organized into five regions, but again the London area (37 per cent) and the South (20 per cent) account for more than half the membership.

Year	Scouts	Guides
1964	1302	1149
1967	1473	1278
1969	1384	1456
1971	1267	1451
1973	1272	1331
1976	1292	1045
1978	1251	1038
1980	1070	901
1982	943	892
1985	808	850
1988	828	678
1990	805	654
1994	780	647

The ZHP has an importance in the Polish community beyond mere numbers. The movement has in the past been seen very much as a leadership cadre for the *emigracja*. It has been recognized that scouting attracts and encourages young people with initiative and of independent minds. Its training and social contacts breed self-confidence and a strong sense of common aims. It was also the most important of the youth organizations in bringing young people together from the various local communities — a process which has resulted in a number of marriages between members of the second generation. There are strong organizational links with the SPK and with the ‘political leadership’, with many former scouts in both.

### *Self-Help and Welfare*

Self-help welfare organizations were established by the Poles as soon as they began to arrive in Britain in large numbers during the 1940s. These included both organizations for civilian welfare, and those set up by and for former soldiers — especially invalids — and their families (widows and orphans). Today several of these are still in existence.

One of the earliest was the Citizens’ Committee for Aid to Refugees which was established in 1940, and was to continue giving aid to subsequent waves of refugees from Poland for over fifty years.<sup>68</sup> Today the Committee is perhaps best known for running the Polish Clinic

<sup>68</sup> See K. Sword *et al.*, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain*, pp. 438–9 and footnotes.

(medical and dental consultations) in London's Weymouth Street. During the communist period it operated as an 'alternative consulate' — its Advice Bureau providing legal help and advice to Poles as well as issuing replacement documents of civil status.

The Relief Society for Poles was formed in 1946 when the Polish Red Cross was wound up by the communist authorities in Poland. (Since the ending of communist rule it has established contact with the revitalized Polish Red Cross.) It runs old people's homes, hostels, rehabilitation centres and organizes medical care. Recently it spent £250,000 renovating its Birmingham property to local authority requirements in order to register as a Residential Care Home. It gives advice on accommodation matters, right of residence and social security benefits, and arranges visits for the elderly in homes and hospitals. In the past it has co-operated with the British Refugee Council.<sup>69</sup>

Other welfare organizations which have 'military' origins include the Union of Polish Invalids (*Związek Inwalidów Polskich*) and the Soldier's Social Fund (*Fundusz Społeczny Żołnierza*) which was instrumental in setting up the Penrhos retirement home in North Wales.

The number of old people in England and Wales as a proportion of the community has risen since the beginning of the century and is continuing to rise. The percentage increase in the elderly 'dependent' section of the population has obvious political and economic implications, since a growing proportion of the non-working population will have to be supported by a smaller number of workers. However the demographic picture which has been presented of the Polish community in Britain (see chapter four) shows that the proportion of elderly people in its ranks is an even greater than in the population at large — a result of the skewed nature of the settlement population of the 1940s.

The particular problems of elderly East European refugees have been the subject of increasing study and concern in recent years — by academics, social workers and activists within the Polish community. It has been realized that in spite of the high incidence of home ownership among Poles and the fact that most experienced continuous employment after their arrival here, nevertheless they are more at risk from mental illness in their later years than other sectors of the population.<sup>70</sup>

Emphasis has been laid on the need for welfare provision to be handled in a Polish environment and the suggestion has even been made

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<sup>69</sup> 'Walny Zebranie Towarzystwa Pomocy Polakom', *Dziennik Polski*, 20 December 1993.

<sup>70</sup> Rita Braitto, 'The Polish Immigrant Experience and Its Relevance for Quality of Life Issues among the Elderly', paper presented at the annual meeting of the British Sociological Association, Edinburgh, 28–31 March 1988. The author bases these assertions upon work by J. Bram, P. Rack, C. Bagley and others indicating a higher rate of mental illness among ethnic minorities — especially recent migrants. See also *Age in Exile*, an eighty-five-page report on elderly exiles in the United Kingdom prepared by the British Refugee Council, London, August 1988.



to Government ministers that employment regulations for incoming Polish visitors should be relaxed in the case of qualified nursing staff to allow them to take up jobs in centres where elderly Poles are maintained.

The Polish press has increasingly run advertisements for residential care and nursing homes, most of which are privately owned and run. However the largest 'community' provision of accommodation for the elderly is provided by the Polish Benevolent Fund (the business arm of the Polish Catholic Mission) through its Housing Association. The PBF Housing Association Ltd. was formed in 1965 and has enabled the Polish Catholic community to apply for local authority help in directing the Polish elderly to the four homes it now runs in Balham, Liverpool, Bolton and Laxton Hall (Northants). The total value of these PBF properties in 1992 was estimated to be some £20 million.<sup>71</sup>

There is great variety in these centres; whereas Laxton Hall is a converted country house and is distant from centres of population, the St Anthony's home in Balham is adjacent to the Polish community's White Eagle Club. The elderly residents can therefore make a short walk across to its Polish restaurant and club premises — and indeed the community's church of Christ the King is a few yards further, on the other side of Balham High Road.

Recent legislation, which came into effect in April 1993, has devolved financial responsibility for care of the elderly from the NHS to local councils. As a result there is now greater difficulty in persuading councils to send the elderly Polish clients to Polish-run homes outside their area (and to pay for their care) when they have already made provision available within the borough.<sup>72</sup>

'Penrhos', a retirement village for Poles, is set in sixteen acres of North Wales countryside near Pwllheli, Cardigan Bay. The site is a former military camp and airfield which was bought from the Air Ministry by various Polish combatants' groups in 1949. It has more than fifty converted barracks which are used as residential quarters, but Penrhos also has dining quarters, a church, a library and a concert hall. Penrhos takes elderly Poles from all over Britain. In 1975 some 230 people were living on the site of whom 185 were residents, the rest staff. More recently the number of residents has dropped; in 1991 it was 140 (fifty in the Special Care Unit and ninety in normal residential quarters). The average age of residents then was over eighty years. In asking why Poles live to such a ripe old age at Penrhos, one Polish author has emphasized the beneficial effects of complete medical care, the curative effects of the fresh air of North Wales and the relaxed style

<sup>71</sup> *Księga Pamiątkowa 40-lecia Polish Benevolent Fund 1952–1992*, London, 1992; 'Jubileusz Polskiego Funduszu Dobroczynności', *Dziennik Polski*, 22 Oct. 1992.

<sup>72</sup> Conversation with Mr J. Palmi, Chairman of Polish Benevolent Fund, 8 November 1993.

of life in comfortable surroundings where there are pastimes, but no stress.<sup>73</sup>

'Antokol', a Polish residential home run by the Polish Citizens' Committee Housing Association Ltd., was initially opened in 1951 at Beckenham. However, conditions in the old Victorian property were not suitable for the elderly and a new premises was bought and converted. The new home is set in the North Kent downs with extensive views over the 'Garden of England'. It was conceived of as a 'home for elderly gentlefolk': that is, admission was intended for a certain class of people commonly described in Polish circles as the 'ageing intelligentsia'. A thousand people have passed through the home since it was inaugurated and there are currently (July 1994) thirty in residence. While most of the residents are able to support themselves from their own resources, there are some who are entitled to social security payments. The staff include nuns from a Polish order, the Felician Sisters, and other Polish-speaking staff.<sup>74</sup>

The Polish residential centre for the elderly at Ilford Park, near Newton Abbot in Devon, was like Penrhos created on the site of a former military camp, in this case on thirty-eight acres of what had once been an army camp and subsequently an American military hospital. But there the similarity ends, since the 'village' at Ilford Park is run by the DHSS rather than by Polish community organizations. It was opened in July 1948 and has maintained a small Polish community ever since. In 1992 a new, modern residential complex was opened by the Polish Consul-General to replace the old wartime barrack blocks. This purpose-built complex is virtually self-sufficient, with residential quarters, shop, chapel, restaurant and common-rooms all under one roof. The place has a definite Polish feel to it: corridors of the new complex are named after Polish towns (hence Wrocław Street, Gdynia Street, Kraków Street) and the shop by the main entrance sells Polish sausage and cakes. The number of residents in 1993 was 106, with an average age of seventy-six.<sup>75</sup>

Finally, some mention should be made of Penley Hospital, situated on the Welsh border in Shropshire. The hospital is the only one of the wartime Polish hospitals still functioning. Formerly it had more than 150 patients, but today there are only two wings devoted to sick Poles, and only fourteen patients in spite of the fact that there are spaces for forty. The hospital staff numbers twenty people, not counting doctors who travel in to attend patients. Now the hospital is no longer under the direct supervision of the Department of Health there are fears for its

<sup>73</sup> W. Moszczyński, 'Penrhos — na walijskiej Siczy', *Dziennik Polski*, 14 June 1993; J. Kowalewski, *Penrhos — Soplicowo w Walii*, London, 1975; J. Kowalewski, 'Penrhos', *Kultura* (Paris), 9/384 (1979), pp. 113–17.

<sup>74</sup> K. Janota-Bzowska, 'Antokol — oaza spokoju', *Dziennik Polski*, 15 July 1994.

<sup>75</sup> A. Fiderkiewicz, 'Ilford Park Polish Home: A Study of an Elderly Polish Community', unpublished paper, 1994.



future. Hospitals in the Wrexham area have now converted to trust status and are responsible for their own budgets. Penley is now run by Chwydian Community Trust based in Wrexham. The future of this Polish 'island' is therefore unclear, although talk of closure has been heard for the past two decades.<sup>76</sup>

The Polish community has developed self-help mechanisms in other areas apart from care of the elderly. As we have seen it has developed education (the Polish Educational Society), youth activities, such as scouting, teaching and research (Sikorski Institute, Polish University Abroad) and the arts (Polish Social and Cultural Institute). A number of Polish foundations contribute to community causes and to initiatives designed to disseminate knowledge of Polish culture. The most recently formed of these is PAFT, the Polonia Aid Foundation Trust, which emerged from the liquidation of the government in exile. With the blessing of the Polish President the assets of the former government were retained in London and the interest which accrues from the resulting investments is dispensed as grants. The trustees meet on a quarterly basis to allocate funding for the arts, research, publishing and other ventures. By contrast, the M.B. Grabowski Foundation has been operating since the 1970s. It too encourages educational work which spreads a knowledge of Polish history and culture. The Feliks Laski Foundation sponsors theatrical productions and the arts generally, while the Lanckoronska Foundation dispenses sums for publishing and similar ventures.

The Polish exile community has to a large extent over the first five decades of its existence in Britain been independent, self-sufficient and reluctant to seek or accept help from outside. To a much greater extent than other minorities it has been too proud to accept what it sees as 'charity'. This is changing, and increasingly Poles are being encouraged to realize that in the changed climate of multi-ethnic Britain their ethnicity is a resource which can be exploited, and indeed must be exploited for the benefit of weaker members of the community such as the elderly.

### *Communication and Information Flow: Press and Publishing*

It has been argued that an ethnic, foreign-language press prevents integration, encourages ghettoization and inhibits learning of the host society's language. Jerzy Zubrzycki, in countering this view, has argued that a foreign-language press is a

... vital factor in maintaining social cohesion of the migrant group and providing social controls which are indispensable in the prevention of such

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<sup>76</sup> 'Szpital polski w Penley', *Dziennik Polski*, 8 September 1994.

manifestations of personal disorganization among migrants as delinquency and mental disorders arising from cultural isolation.<sup>77</sup>

In the past the Poles have been prolific in their production of periodicals. Among 728 titles of all categories published by Polish refugees in thirty-nine countries during the 1940s, some 202 were published in Britain.<sup>78</sup>

Many of these titles ceased to appear in 1945 when funding from the Polish government was withdrawn, but in the new situation caused by resettlement in Britain, more titles appeared on the news-stands. Of fifty-three publications appearing in 1953, only six had survived from the war years; the remainder had been started up since 1946.<sup>79</sup> By 1960, though, the number of titles had fallen to thirty-three. Although most were still in existence in 1976, all reported a decline in readership.<sup>80</sup>

The *Polish Daily* (*Dziennik Polski*) is one of the oldest periodicals and certainly the widest read within the Polish community. It began publication as a soldiers' newspaper in 1940 and has continued in print down to the present. Today it is the only Polish-language daily in Western Europe. (The only other Polish daily, *Narodowiec*, which appeared in France, closed down in 1989.) The circulation of the *Daily* has declined since the heady days of the late 1940s, though, when it was selling over 30,000 copies.<sup>81</sup> By the early 1990s it was being printed in a run of some 7000 copies. Its sister paper the *Polish Weekly* (*Tydzien Polski*) sells slightly more — around 8000 being printed; it seems that some people are content to buy a Polish newspaper once a week.

There have been questions raised over the viability of both newspapers for some years now owing to a declining circulation. To some extent both titles have been shielded from commercial realities. They come under the aegis of the Polish Cultural Foundation (*Polska Fundacja Kulturalna*) which also produces books and other periodicals for a Polish readership. Although the editorial offices are in London, the newspapers are printed in Hove.

An indication of the change which has overtaken the Polish press in the last few years is that none of the current editorial staff are members of the original exile settlement from the 1940s. Indeed at the time of writing (summer 1994), the editors of the two newspapers are both newcomers to Britain, having arrived in the 1980s — and both women. They have made brave efforts to breathe new life into the two papers,

<sup>77</sup> J. Zubrzycki, 'The Role of the Foreign-language Press in Migrant Adaptation', *Population Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1958, p. 76.

<sup>78</sup> Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain*, p. 76.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 134–5.

<sup>80</sup> S. Patterson, 'The Poles: An Exile Community in Britain', in J.L. Watson (ed.), *Between Two Cultures. Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, Oxford, 1977, p. 236.

<sup>81</sup> S. Patterson, 'Polish London', in R. Glass *et al.* (eds), *London: Aspects of Change*, London, 1964, p. 341fn.



but attempts to revamp them have run up against the natural conservatism of their ageing readership. Some four-fifths of the readership are now over sixty years of age.<sup>82</sup> Few of the younger generation Poles encountered in the course of this study read the *Dziennik* or its sister paper. Of those that did, most had it passed on by elderly relatives. Only one couple admitted to buying it.

For the migrant in the early years of settlement, as Zubrzycki observes, the foreign-language press fulfils a number of valuable functions:

It seeks to provide news of the world that the settlers left behind and to instruct them about the new world; it comments on migrant affairs and serves as an outlet for the airing of grievances and complaints ... it serves the very real need of the immigrants who cannot turn to the local newspapers.<sup>83</sup>

The *Polish Daily* still fulfils many of these functions but the latter consideration, referring to the linguistic shortcomings of the newcomers, does not hold true in the 1990s. A generation or two on, there is likely to be less need for an ethnic press on linguistic grounds unless a subsequent 'tail' of newcomers is substantial. The younger generations are likely to prefer news media in the language of the host society — with which they are already more familiar than that of their parents. So ultimately, as Zubrzycki goes on to observe, the disappearance of an ethnic newspaper is often a sign that assimilation is gathering pace.<sup>84</sup>

Today there are relatively few Poles resident in Britain who have so little knowledge of English that they cannot turn to English newspapers. Most of the newcomers master English quickly, and if they want to read Polish materials are more likely to go for Warsaw publications such as *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Wprost*, *Polityka*. Others may seek out lighter materials from Poland or special interest publications such *Przekrój*, *Kobieta i Życie*, or *Przegląd Sportowy*. In the areas of dense Polish residence of west London such Polish periodicals can often be obtained in newsagents and at kiosks. An additional consideration is cost. In the course of the newspaper circulation war which flared up during the summer of 1994, the price of *The Times* was reduced to twenty pence, that of the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Independent* to thirty pence. By contrast the *Polish Daily* cost forty pence.

The *Polish Daily* of the 1990s is an eight-page, tabloid-size news-sheet. It relays news of current events in Poland on the political,

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<sup>82</sup> This information comes from Ms K. Budd, editor of the *Polish Daily*, based on a questionnaire circulated with the newspaper in the course of 1993. Some two thousand replies were received. Responses to the questionnaire revealed that 79 per cent of readers were over sixty-nine years old and that men outnumbered women by the ratio sixty to forty.

<sup>83</sup> J. Zubrzycki, 'The Role of the Foreign-language Press', p. 76.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

economic and cultural fronts. It now frequently reprints articles from Polish press organs such as *Gazeta Wyborcza*. It has news from other communities in the Polish diaspora — particularly in recent years about Poles in the 'East' — that is, in the republics of the former Soviet Union. It carries news from Britain and around the world taken from news agency reports, but it also runs articles and reports which are of specific interest to Poles in Britain. Prominent among these are the reports of social and cultural events within Polish communities around the country: theatre reviews, harvest festival balls, Third of May *akademie* (commemorative reviews), meetings of local or regional ex-combatants' groups, sporting events and scout camps. The *Polish Daily* is also a key medium through which the Polish national organizations are able to contact their members and report to them. Bodies such as the Federation, the Polish Catholic Mission and the Polish Educational Foundation use the *Dziennik* to launch appeals, publicize events or to sound out public opinion.

Critics of the *Polish Daily* draw attention to the custom whereby (usually self-appointed) local correspondents report tediously on local events, with loving details of who took part, gave speeches, organized the sessions, coached the children, baked the cakes and so forth. There is often a lack of distance and 'objectivity' about such reports. But perhaps most striking is the contrast between such light, sometimes gossipy items, and the long, detailed and dense analyses of political or historical events which accompany them. The change is like moving from light, superficial news reports in the *Daily Mail* to a lengthy, analytical article in the *Spectator*. This range of approaches, although it means the paper is uneven, is also inevitable since the paper is having to appeal to a wide spread of interests. The Polish community is no longer so numerous that it can support a large number of separate periodicals for special interest groups.

The *Polish Daily* has a further important function as a means of news transmission within the community. It carries obituary notices, which are of great importance for such an ageing readership. It also carries advertisements for work, holidays, property for sale (including in Poland), legal advice, rest homes and sheltered accommodation and, though sparser now than in recent years, a matrimonial column. Lectures, exhibitions, dances and theatre productions are announced. A continuing service is provided by advertisements from travel bureaux and transport firms — mostly Polish-owned — offering conveyance of goods to Eastern Europe. A recent innovation has been the inclusion of the daily programmes of the two Polish satellite television channels.

The question of the newspaper's survival raises a number of issues. It is not merely that the older readership is gradually disappearing, but whether the newspaper can be adapted in such a way as to appeal to younger members of the community, and particularly to the second generation. Experience, as we have seen from Zubrzycki's observation,



suggests that this is unlikely. The language is a large barrier, even though the Polish of the *Polish Daily* is, on the whole, less 'dense' and difficult than that encountered in serious publications from Poland. Past efforts to introduce an English-language page or a supplement for the younger generation have quickly foundered.

Other publications which are produced within the Polish community include Catholic publications such as the *Gazeta Niedzielna*, which appears every Sunday and is often sold outside churches. Its circulation was 3950 in 1966 and 2900 in 1986. In the mid-1990s some 300 copies of the *Gazeta* were being printed, but precise circulation figures were not available. Significant numbers of the paper were being distributed free — for example to members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in Poland.

The *Orzeł Biały* (*White Eagle*) is a combatants' journal which was originally published by the Polish Army in Russia (beginning in 1941). It has appeared continuously since then, despite changing its format. At the beginning of 1994 its fifteen-hundredth issue came off the press. Now a glossy monthly, since 1994 it has been under the editorship of a second-generation Pole. The emphasis of the journal has been broadened from a concentration on the political-military events of the 1940s and now carries articles on contemporary Poland.

The remainder of the Polish publishing output is aimed at more specific readership markets, and includes religious and educational periodicals. A more general work of the reference kind is the *Polski Informator* — a kind of Polish 'Yellow Pages' — produced by the Federation of Poles in Great Britain. The fourth edition (for 1995–6) runs to 144 pages and contains advertisements on everything from Polish satellite television to Polish law firms.

Local publishing initiatives over recent years have included *Panorama Polska*, produced by the Nottingham community, and *Fotorama*, a photographic chronicle of the Polish community edited by the late Edward Wojtczak. Community activities at local level are usually announced in parish news-sheets or, after mass, from the pulpit. The voice of the Polish community can be heard in a one-hour weekly radio programme on BBC Radio Coventry, but otherwise the Poles in Britain have generally been slow to break into the mass electronic media. The availability of Polish television programmes via satellite has made some impact in the clubs, where it is available for the elderly, but there has been a relatively modest take-up of the service by Polish households and it seems unlikely, for a number of reasons, that the service will lead to the re-ethnicization of the younger generation on a significant scale.

## 6 The Local Community

The Polish element in British society — by which I mean not only those of Polish birth who show up in the decennial Census statistics, but also those of Polish background born outside Poland (whether or not they retain Polish culture or maintain ties with organized Polish community life) — is now well dispersed. They can be found in all walks of life and in the remotest parts of these islands.<sup>1</sup> But the core of organized Polish life centres on some dozens of local ‘communities’ which for the most part reflect the original settlement patterns of the 1940s. They are in medium and large urban-industrial environments which drew in Polish labour from nearby resettlement camps and from further afield.

These Polish communities became an integral feature of British urban life from the 1940s onwards although they were largely ‘invisible’ to many Britons.<sup>2</sup> The communities were founded upon vigorous networks of mutual support and solidarity and it is important to bear in mind that, for all the preceding discussion of émigré politics, the government in exile and continuity of state institutions, for most Poles community involvement meant associating with their compatriots at local level.

### *Employment*

The first requirement for the establishment of a community was employment. Leicester attracted Poles to work in textiles, hosiery, light industry and the mining industry. Manchester and the surrounding towns of south Lancashire also attracted labour into textiles and light industry. Bradford attracted labour to the woollen industry, including Poles and other nationalities who had been recruited as European Voluntary Workers in the late 1940s. Slough, in the Thames valley, attracted labour to its trading estate, where a variety of light industrial and engineering

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<sup>1</sup> The 1991 Census for Scotland (Table 7) even recorded the presence of four Poles in the Orkney Isles.

<sup>2</sup> In her work on immigrants in Croydon during 1958–9 Sheila Patterson records the surprise of her informants, ‘whether from the employment exchange, the Assistance Board, local government, the local Press, or the voluntary services’, when told that there was such a large and cohesive Polish settlement in their area. *Immigrants in Industry*, London, 1968, p. 28.



enterprises provided a range of employment opportunities.

Sometimes a major employer took on large numbers of Poles and enabled them to concentrate residentially. Hence in Swindon, British Rail was a big employer of Polish labour. In Melton Mowbray, apart from local mining and steel production, the Pedigree Petfoods plant took on several hundred Poles during the 1960s and 1970s. This was a well-paid and reliable form of employment in which many remained until retirement. (Interestingly it is a sister firm of the Mars confectionery plant in Slough where, certainly in the 1970s, many women from the Polish community were employed.) It enabled a Polish community to flourish in what would otherwise have been a most unlikely setting. Some Polish-owned firms were also significant employers of Polish labour; for example, the firm 'Poloplastics' as described by Sheila Patterson in Croydon in the 1950s and, in Slough during the 1970s, 'Pol-Elec'.<sup>3</sup>

Many of the Poles interviewed in the course of the research referred to the number of Polish businesses that had existed in their local towns in past years. Leicester, Bradford, Slough and other towns could boast Polish delicatessens, watch- and shoe-repairers, barbers, garages, travel agents, 'parcel firms' (for sending goods to relatives in Poland), photographic salons, not to mention professional services such as Polish doctors and dentists. In London, as one might expect, the range was even larger. Polish trade directories from the 1950s and 1960s list hundreds of Polish-owned businesses.<sup>4</sup> The significance of such ethnic businesses was considerable. They 'cushioned' the older generation from language difficulties encountered outside the ethnic community and fostered the links which strengthened the community. Some older generation Poles, working in a Polish factory environment, with a Polish social and family life outside their place of work and relying for their news on the Polish press, had little need to learn English.

The availability of such employment opportunities served to encourage the growth of a Polish community — and determined its size. But it was the *nature* of the employment which determined the character of the local community — how concentrated or dispersed it would be, its composition and particularly its 'class structure'. The industrial Midlands and North attracted many working-class Poles or those from rural backgrounds, who were satisfied with jobs in industry and with provincial life. This included people brought to Britain as European

<sup>3</sup> See S. Patterson, *Immigrants in Industry*, and K. Sword, 'Ethnic Identity and Association among Polish Émigrés in a British Town', DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 1982, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the *Informator Handlowy* produced by the Union of Polish Merchants and Industrialists in 1950 contained 104 pages of business addresses from estate agents to manufacturers of leather goods. The sixth edition of this guide, produced in 1963 (and now renamed the *Polski Informator Przemysłowo-Handlowy*), was a more ambitious project altogether. It contained 144 pages, including an introductory section with advice on insurance, covenants, wills and renting law.

Voluntary Workers and those who had served in the German Army. These, for the most part, played a less active role within the community. Others, of middle class and more educated background, frequently sought something better. There was a tendency for the 'officer class' to migrate to the South and particularly to the London area. The result was that the more educated, leadership elements were concentrated in the South-East, while in the provinces a greater burden of responsibility for organizing community life was thrust on the few members of the 'intelligentsia' who remained.

Sheffield attracted Poles to work in the newly nationalized steel industry after the war, but these were predominantly jobs for men. By contrast with textile towns such as Bradford, Manchester and Bolton, there were few jobs for women. Consequently there was an even stronger imbalance of the sexes here than the national figures would suggest. The 1951 Census showed 1061 men (88 per cent) as compared with 145 women (12 per cent).<sup>5</sup> Similar problems of imbalance could be found in other areas, especially those which attracted agricultural labour, such as Lampeter, Hereford and East Anglia. Clearly where such a disparity existed it was far more difficult for the group to reproduce itself, either because Polish men were not marrying, or because they were marrying non-polish women..

London communities formed at different times, but the capital held an obvious attraction, particularly for the more educated classes of Poles. Employment opportunities were more plentiful and the variety of jobs on offer was greater. Many who began work as porters with London Underground or kitchen workers in restaurants and hotels eventually moved on to work as clerks or as insurance agents.<sup>6</sup> Also, London offered a rich vein of Polish social and cultural life: it was the centre of the *emigracja's* political and organizational life and contained denser social networks which made adjustment and adaptation easier.

### *Residence Patterns*

Poles, like other migrant groups, although they initially rented rooms, were keen to purchase their own homes. In the 1950s and 1960s they occupied properties in the cheaper, inner-city areas of British cities. As Sheila Patterson has written:

<sup>5</sup> A. Kucewicz, 'The Immigrant Experience: The Reception of Polish Refugees and their Adaptation to Life in Sheffield post-1945', BA dissertation, Department of Historical and Critical Studies, Sheffield City Polytechnic, 1988, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> A. Blum, *Moja Zimna Wojna*, London, 1984. Blum started his working life in England as a London Underground porter, then moved into office work with a travel firm before being employed by the Americans in the Polish Watchmen's Companies in Germany. He later returned to Britain and took up a teaching career.



Within each town or city, Polish settlement patterns have been largely dictated by the availability of accommodation and, later, of capital for house purchase. Like most immigrant groups the Poles have tended to cluster together, although there are no Polish ghettos as such.<sup>7</sup>

So, for example, they purchased in the inner boroughs of London (Clapham, Earl's Court), in Manchester's Moss Side and Cheetham Hill areas, in the Highfields area of Leicester and in the wards of terraced and semi-detached housing close to Slough's trading estate.

In some areas Poles remained in closed centres (resettlement camps converted into local authority hostels) until forced to move out by their imminent closure during the 1950s. The result was that houses in new developments were snapped up and some particularly dense Polish residence patterns were created in local wards. The residential proximity of Polish families in the early years (1950s and 1960s) enabled many of the ties established in the camps to be maintained and the networks of the community to be nourished. In commenting on the supposed 'anonymity' of city life, social anthropologist F.G. Bailey has observed:

Research has shown that urban neighbourhoods are not always like this; villages, so to speak, exist inside long-settled urban communities and the warm embrace (or suffocation) of community living is found there no less than in the countryside.<sup>8</sup>

Much ethnic minority life conforms very much with this observation, since ethnic networks form a community within a community.

In the early days of Polish life in urban Britain there was more 'overcrowding' — relatives crammed in to help reduce the costs of housing — and ethnic networks were denser and multiplex. There was also very much a sense of the Polish community as a 'moral community'. The need to work well, perform well at school, behave well and not get into trouble was regarded as important, not only because such exemplary behaviour brought credit to one's family, but because it reflected well on Poles everywhere. There was a fierce sense of community pride. In passing beyond ethnic community boundaries, therefore, the individual assumed something of an ambassadorial function.

In industrial centres and smaller towns such as Slough or Melton Mowbray, the presence of a few large employers enabled numbers of Poles to settle relatively close to one another; personal ties were easier to maintain both through work and through neighbourhood links. In Brighton, by contrast, the settlement was more dispersed — and also more entrepreneurial, including Poles who were engaged in running

<sup>7</sup> S. Patterson, 'The Poles: An Exile Community in Britain', in J.L. Watson (ed.), *Between Two Cultures. Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, Oxford, 1977, p. 233.

<sup>8</sup> F.G. Bailey, 'Gifts and Poison', in Bailey (ed.), *Gifts and Poison. The Politics of Reputation*, Oxford, 1971, p. 5.

cafés, restaurants, guest-houses and hotels. Partly as a consequence of this, the community there was never as tightly organized or as 'dynamic' as in some other centres.

In Southampton the presence of three main 'concentrations' of Poles has prevented consensus in the past on where (if at all) a Polish church should be sited. The main axis of competition has been between groups in Southampton and neighbouring Eastleigh. (Bournemouth is the third of the Polish parish's centres.) Consequently, discussions over the building of a Polish church in the area have come to nothing.<sup>9</sup>

In the 1960s, and increasingly during the 1970s, at the moment when the Polish community was consolidating itself in organizational terms and exerting a great deal of effort to establishing church and club premises, many individual Poles were on the move. This included not only members of the older generation who had improved their material situation (though many stayed put), but particularly members of the younger generation who went into white-collar employment. They were moving out into more affluent and salubrious neighbourhoods, dormitory towns and villages. Behind them fresh waves of newcomers had moved in — in particular the Asian and Afro-Caribbean groups of New Commonwealth immigrants.

The demographic changes in the community have resulted in some interesting changes. In the London area, Ealing has grown in strength and numbers, west London providing a magnet both to young Poles of the second generation and to newcomers from Poland. Putney, to the south-west, is a new parish resulting from settlement in the area by Poles of all categories, but particularly newcomers from Poland. On the south coast, there has been a strengthening of relatively weak communities such as Eastbourne and Bournemouth due to retirement migration.

### *Community Property*

The Poles demonstrated at an early stage a desire to create their own social and community centres. It may be that this was a form of defence — a safeguard against the hostility of the British working man which many experienced in the early years. But an overriding factor was the need to meet in Polish surroundings where they would feel 'at home'. Ultimately many communities also set about buying or building their own churches. The result of such combined efforts has been a quite astonishing level of community property — even members of the smallest community, it seems, feel that self-respect demands they create a *dom parafialny* or a small club. Some indeed have had two centres of social activity, for example Leicester, Edinburgh, Luton, Glasgow and

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<sup>9</sup> Conversation with Fr. A. Zuziak, Southampton, 28 February 1994.



Liverpool. The value of the existing properties now runs into tens, if not hundreds, of millions of pounds.

The Slough community in the early 1980s numbered not many more than a thousand people. Yet it boasted a modern purpose-built church (in a position not far from the town centre), a presbytery and a modern club premises in outlying Stoke Poges. The Slough Club is not affiliated either to the parish or to the Combatants' Association (SPK) but is run by the Polish Association in Slough. Its independence arises from historical circumstances according to which the central SPK authorities refused the local group a loan to hire a club premises in the 1960s. The local Poles decided to go it alone, at first hiring premises, and in the 1970s they bought a magnificent estate on the outskirts of the town which had belonged to a local firm. (It is a stone's throw from the Stoke Poges church which, legend has it, was the setting for Thomas Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'.) Apart from the club building, since extended to include a dance hall, it boasts a large playing-field with three football pitches and a bowling green.

The 'White Eagle' Polish Club in south London is situated across the Balham High Road from the Polish Church of Christ the King. Whereas the Polish parish was established in 1948, the club was purchased in 1969. (Polish members are keen to tell visitors that it was once owned by the notorious Kray brothers, who had their casino on the upper floor!) It is now adjoined by the St Anthony's residential home for elderly Poles, which houses forty-four people. The club itself is extensive, with bars, a restaurant, club rooms and a hall as well as administrative offices. Its premises are rented out to British organizations (for example the British Legion and the Rotary Club) and from the beginning a key purpose of the club has been to raise funds for the purchase of the church. The club is also of course the venue for Polish clubs and associations to meet, and the notice-board by the entrance informs members of approaching social events.

However, in many other clubs, particularly those run by the combatants, it is difficult not to carry away an impression of decay — of the premises being run-down, poorly decorated, neglected. This is a powerful disincentive to younger members, who find the atmosphere in an English pub more lively and congenial. The impression of 'old wordliness' is compounded where there is a predominantly elderly clientele. The sight in one club of an elderly Pole, seated in a corner staring at a glass of lager and periodically erupting to shout at an imaginary neighbour, reminds one that sometimes these clubs play an important role as havens for the disturbed members of the community, who would probably not be tolerated elsewhere.

The drive to establish centres of community life has not been without problems. As a result of early residential patterns Polish community buildings in many urban settings — churches, parish halls and clubs — are located in inner-city wards which were once areas of dense Polish

settlement but have since ceased to be so. Secondly, they are often in districts which have been taken over by other groups of immigrants. This is the case in Leicester, for example, where in parking the car near the Polish church, one notices the halal butchers and other retail outlets of the local Ugandan–Asian community. A converted shop premises advertises itself as the centre for the Federation of Muslim Organizations.<sup>10</sup> Bradford too has a Church and parish club premises which are close to the city centre in an area now inhabited by Bengali Muslims. In south London, the impressive Balham Church and parish club situated on the Balham High Road are also now in an area of mixed population but with a high proportion of Asian and Caribbean immigrants.

The location of community buildings in inner-city areas, sometimes decaying areas, and the influx of other immigrant groups is not necessarily a problem. If the premises are central and accessible and congenial, it may be best to leave them where they are; indeed the idea of following their members out into the suburbs would probably be futile. But Manchester has perhaps the worst problem of any major community in this respect. At the time of my visit to the Manchester community in the summer of 1993, the national press had been reporting gunfights, related to the distribution of narcotics, between rival gangs of youths. Much of this was happening in Moss Side, where both the Polish Church and the Ex-Combatant's Association are situated. Both institutions had experienced trouble. Owing to the vandalizing of parked cars during Sunday Mass, cars were being parked in a wired compound with a guard on patrol. In the case of the SPK club situated about half a mile away — a large rambling building which is a converted church — a fight had recently broken out involving a coloured man, a non-member, who had been refused admittance and had drawn a knife. This is obviously a matter of concern to those considering attending social functions at the club, or who are taking their children there for folk-dance sessions. Why should members risk travelling in from their comfortable neighbourhood to such a high-risk environment?

### *Organizational Structure*

In the past Polish community life at local level has been rich and varied, offering many outlets for leadership skills and energies. Organizational life has mainly been divided between religious (parish) and combatant organizations with educational, youth and sports activities also important. The degree and range of associational life varies of course from one community to another. Much, after all, depends on the perceived

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<sup>10</sup> The Polish Church in Leicester's Melbourne Street was previously a Methodist chapel. During a brief stay in Leicester during 1993 the English wife of my Polish host told me that her father — a Methodist preacher — had once preached there.



relevance of particular organizations, on the human resources of the community and on the readiness of individuals to commit time and energy to the task of organization. Writing in the mid-1980s Scragg identified some thirty-four organizations in the Manchester Polish community.<sup>11</sup> This is considerably more than one would find in a smaller community such as Ashton or Stoke.

Support for associational life and activities also changes across time. It is highly unlikely that the Polish community in Manchester, although still one of the largest in the country, would be able to mobilize support for a parade on Polish Independence Day to match the one which took place in 1951. Or that 6000 Poles could be found to celebrate the anniversary of the 1791 Polish Constitution, as they did at Belle Vue on 3 May 1953, in the presence of President Zaleski and General Sosnkowski.<sup>12</sup> In the Luton-Dunstable community a high point in associational activity was reached in the 1970s, but support for community activities began to ebb after a schism occurred in the parish. As a result the local scouting movement folded, as did the local folk-dance group.

Yet even in the reduced circumstances of the 1990s larger communities have the advantage that there is more going on and they find it easier to draw people in — particularly when they are concentrated geographically. For the smaller and more dispersed communities the work of organization is more difficult. From a social point of view, there is reinforcement in seeing large numbers. If one group organizes a *zabawa* (a dance or similar social event) and another group fails to support it, then the lack of numbers is at once evident. As one priest said to me, 'We demand more of people in these smaller communities than in the larger ones. If someone does not turn up to a meeting then it is immediately noticed.'<sup>13</sup>

One feature common to all communities is that in recent years the influence of the ex-combatants' organizations has fallen off at local level as their membership has aged and fallen in numbers. Since the 1970s there has been a corresponding growth in the position of the church and parish structure, with a tacit acknowledgement on the part of Poles that if they are going to continue to organize themselves as a minority community in Britain, then it will have to be around the church.

The accompanying diagram (Figure 1) is a composite illustration of the organizational structure of a Polish community. It does not represent any one community but it may be said to be 'typical' in the sense that a medium-sized community can be. It also omits the business side of

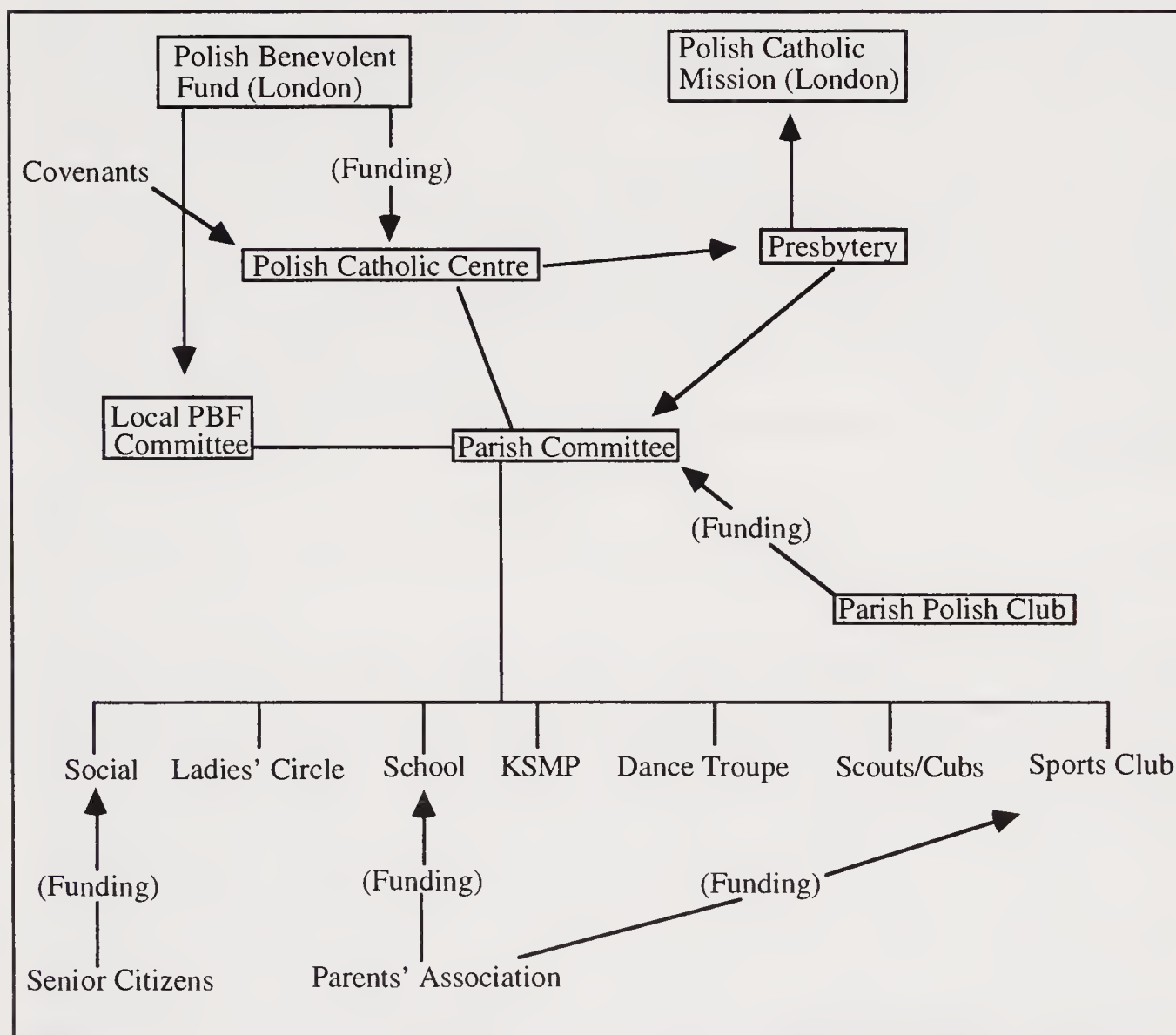
<sup>11</sup> Although this included a number of groups which have now disappeared such as those supporting Solidarity in Poland. T. Scragg, 'The Polish Community in Manchester and the North-West', MA thesis, Manchester Polytechnic, 1986.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Conversation with Fr. A. Zuziak, Southampton, 28 February 1994.

community life — the travel bureaux and parcels firms, the delicatessens and other small businesses.

Figure 1  
The Structure of a Polish Community<sup>14</sup>



In its earliest form the community was a means of strength through unity — a way of uniting for a common purpose which included social motives, but also psychological, charitable and self-help factors. Grouping in numbers and frequent encounters with one's fellow-countrymen were reassuring in an alien milieu and helped to maintain self-confidence. One could swap stories about the homeland or one's wartime experiences with people who understood. One could sometimes encounter friends and neighbours from the old days. The community was a resource, where one could turn for help, and for information about jobs,

14 This diagram is based on the structure of the Polish community in Melton Mowbray. While each community's associational structure is different, Melton's is distinguished by the absence of a combatants' group of any significance.



housing, the homeland, sending parcels, bringing relatives over and so on.

The commitment of time and energy in the early decades was considerable. The sense of patriotism and idealism was strong. Many people from the ranks of the intelligentsia regarded it as their duty to give up their free time and make a contribution, whether by teaching in the Polish school, organizing the scouts, directing the choir or other activities. Also, as other writers have observed, there may well have been a degree of 'compensation' on the part of educated members of the community, some of whom were forced to undertake relatively menial employment upon demobilization.<sup>15</sup> Polish community life was able to compensate them in some measure; it offered them the status and intellectual stimulation they lacked in their place of work. Although then, as now, there were what Michael Walzer has referred to as 'free-loaders' — people whose prime consideration in life was the improvement of their material situation but were prepared to use the facilities that were available within the ethnic community, either for themselves or their families.<sup>16</sup>

### *Disputes and Factionalism*

Historically it is possible to view many local communities not only in terms of commitment and contribution, but also in terms of competition and rivalry — between organizations and between individuals. In this sense the local community becomes not so much a sphere of harmonious co-operation but an arena in which organizations compete for the loyalty of community members and individuals vie for office within those organizations. Such a perspective may seem unreal in the 1990s, when evidence from most Polish communities suggests that as many problems occur in recruiting people to positions of responsibility as in mediating between competing claims, but it applies very much to the earlier years of Polish community life. The evidence of factional disputes and divisions is plentiful.

According to one definition of the term, factions are 'political groups engaged in organized conflict about the uses of public power'.<sup>17</sup> Another definition of factionalism casts it as 'overt conflict within a group which

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<sup>15</sup> See, for example, S. Patterson, 'The Poles: An Exile Community in Britain', p. 299.

<sup>16</sup> Walzer writes of 'religious and cultural free-loaders, their lives enhanced by a community they do not actively support and by an identity they need not themselves cultivate'. M. Walzer, 'Pluralism: A Political Perspective', *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, 1980, pp. 781–7.

<sup>17</sup> R.W. Nicholas, 'Factions: A Comparative Analysis', in M. Banton (ed.), *Political Systems and the Distribution of Power*, London, 1968, p. 28.

leads to increasing abandonment of co-operative activities'.<sup>18</sup> The conventional formulation then denotes organized subgroups within a wider community, involved in an overt struggle for clearly perceived goals. It is a moot point to what extent past conflicts within the Polish community have been 'organized' and to what extent they have been 'overt'. Also, if the goals in various disputes have been different, the outcomes too have been contrasting: in some cases they have led to disillusionment, atrophy and disintegration, while in others the competitive spirit engendered has led to the development of two rival centres of allegiance.

The main fault line within Polish communities in the past has normally been between the 'parish', as a centre of organized religious life, and secular bodies, with the ex-combatants' groups prominent. Often squabbles were about the ownership of property. But conflict has arisen too between factions within a parish structure — or, in at least one reported case, due to 'external' factors.

There were several causes of fractiousness. Personal rivalries and antagonisms played a part, and it is possible too that the frustrations of exile may have accentuated irritability. The disputes of the 1950s in the émigré political leadership led to corresponding divisions at local level. But from the late 1950s the chief reason for splits in the community ranks was the arrival of a new priest from Poland, following the death or retirement of the old *proboszcz*. The older generation of priests had mostly come to Britain as 'military chaplains' accompanying the troops. They were steeped in the military-political ethos of the *emigracja* and knew well the trials their faithful were experiencing. They also 'knew their place', in that they acknowledged the principles of exile and the primacy of the combatant organizational structure.

The new generation of priests were different. They came from a communist Poland and were of course travelling on 'communist passports' — immediately a cause for suspicion to the politically more irreconcilable elements.<sup>19</sup> Several had different ideas from their predecessors. Many felt they should take the lead in organizing community life — just as the priests who accompanied the peasant migrations from Poland to North and South America during the late nineteenth century had done. It may be that they were acting in a realistic and far-sighted way — seeing that the military-political ethos as a mobilizing force was ebbing and would not outlast the generation which adhered to it. Nonetheless attempts by new priests to play a more prominent role aroused hostility and revived old pre-war traditions of anti-clericalism. On a personal level the émigrés did not want to be

<sup>18</sup> A.R. Beals and B.T. Siegel, 'Pervasive Factionalism', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 62, 1960, pp. 394–417.

<sup>19</sup> There is an extended discussion of the position of these priests in the monthly *Kultura* during 1969. See, for example, 'List do księży z paszportami PRL', *Kultura* (Paris), 5/260 (1969), pp. 41–4.



treated as the illiterate peasants of earlier migrations, and on a collective level they wanted acknowledgement that they were qualitatively different, in their motivations for remaining abroad and for the level of social organization which they had already established.

Yet Czaykowski and Sulik wrote, as early as 1960:

The Polish church in emigration is in possession of such powerful resources that it could become a serious competitor for the social organizations — headed by the SPK. In fact we can leave out the conditional: rivalry is an established fact.<sup>20</sup>

Even at this early stage they were able to list conflicts at communities in Halifax, Mansfield, Swindon, Newcastle and Birmingham where, they recorded, there had been a radical attempt to enclose the whole of Polish social life within the parish organization. In the intervening decades there have been many more conflicts, perhaps the saddest example of which is recorded in Liverpool and has resulted in the virtual disappearance of the community.

A further cause of division have been the activities of organizations inspired by the agencies of the communist government in Warsaw. The Polish community in Dundee was split when the Scottish–Polish Cultural Association, widely believed to have been inspired by the Polish consulate, gained support and threatened to take over community organizations. This led to the closure of the Polish Club in Dundee. Scragg suggests that the dispute in the Polish community in Liverpool during the 1970s was also exploited by ‘outside forces’.<sup>21</sup>

In some circumstances conflict can, as George Simmel pointed out, have a positive effect on social cohesion and integration.<sup>22</sup> There is evidence that in some centres the competition and rivalry that have been engendered have led to an enhanced level of commitment and effort. It is also true that conflict and factionalism are by no means unknown in other ethnic communities. Less than a mile from where I am writing, the existence of three synagogues testifies to divisions in the Brighton and Hove Jewish community. Divisions of this kind often become more bitter and personalized the smaller the group involved. But the Poles have a strong self-image of themselves as being opinionated, argumentative and a people who often find it difficult to co-operate among themselves. (‘Where there are two Poles you will find three political parties.’) Younger-generation Poles frequently referred to such disputes as a reason

<sup>20</sup> B. Czaykowski and B. Sulik, *Polacy w Wielkiej Brytanii*, Paris, 1961, pp. 435–6.

<sup>21</sup> T.W. Scragg, ‘The Polish Community in Manchester and the North-West’, p. 88.

<sup>22</sup> Simmel quoted in L. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict*. London, 1956, p. 38.

for the stunted development of community organizations in the past, or for their own decision to distance themselves from the community

### *Links Outside the Local Community*

No local community exists in isolation. Each is linked to the network of Polish communities throughout Britain and ultimately to the wider Polish diaspora and to Poland itself. The most obvious example perhaps are the formal institutional structures which subordinate clubs and associations such as the SPK, the scouts and the Parish Centre to a national body centred on London. (Most bodies of this kind are organized in the first instance on a regional basis.)

On an intermediate level, there are the contacts which take place by virtue of participation in social, cultural and sports activities. The choir from community 'A' travels to give concerts in communities 'X', 'Y' and 'Z' and has links with the choirs in those communities. The scouts and sports teams (volleyball, football) meet and compete with corresponding groups in other Polish centres. Dance groups travel widely, as do theatre groups when, for example, a Nativity play is circulating. While all this contributes towards a wider sense of identity and community cohesion, there is an element of both display and rivalry.

As a corollary of this each community bears an 'image' which the outsider will be aware of, depending on the prominence of the community and his degree of contact with it. Hence, in the early 1980s, Slough was represented to me by London Poles as being 'ultra-religious', 'active', and 'generous' (*hojny*) in contributing to charitable and community causes. Oxford was described to me as 'ageing' and 'dwindling', Cambridge as 'sleepy' and 'working-class'. Ealing was variously described as 'large', 'wealthy', 'artistic' and 'exclusive-snobish'. Of course these views are not necessarily held by the members of the communities described and may be far from accurate, but they are a barometer of the relationship between the communities and an indication of the attitudes, assumptions and complexes which come into play when the communities come into contact.

From time to time it is possible to detect a tension between the provincial communities and the London centre — a tension which manifests itself in press exchanges or in the course of conversation. The feeling is sometimes expressed by Poles in the North and Midlands that the 'London Poles' look down on their provincial cousins. A particular cause for complaint is that Poles in the provinces have contributed much to building community institutions, but have not seen much return from their efforts. Most of the benefits are disproportionately enjoyed by Poles in the capital.

At the other extreme are informal contacts. Personal and family networks stretch out beyond the local community and are sometimes



numerous and complex. Kinship charts compiled during fieldwork in the early 1980s showed a wide geographical spread of family members across communities, countries and even continents.

## The Culture and Traditions of the Polish Community

In the opening chapter I drew attention briefly to the role of culture, or cultural transmission, as a factor in ethnic community cohesion and boundary maintenance. I suggested that it was unwise to view overt cultural markers in all cases as defining factors in ethnicity, or as otherwise measuring the health of the ethnic community. As I have pointed out elsewhere, third- and fourth-generation ethnics in the United States (including Poles) often have little in common with the culture of their homeland. Yet they still identify themselves as 'Poles' in American society. Cultural patterns of ethnic minority groups are never immutable. They adapt to circumstances. Often in the case of a recent migrant group they are affected by the cultural patterns of the host society and become diluted or modified. In other circumstances the ritual and symbolic usages of the ethnic minority may be deliberately accentuated in order to fulfil the function of maintaining social boundaries. Differences are emphasized rather than being softened or smoothed over. The customs and traditions of the hosts can sometimes be adopted or adapted too.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, within the ethnic community itself, the erosion and loss of cultural knowledge often creates tensions. Loss of language skills in particular — language for the Poles long being taken as a cornerstone of national identity — is viewed as evidence of assimilation, and the person who fails to master the language can be made to feel an outsider. The maintenance of cultural traditions, then, is felt to be important by members of the Polish community, although younger generation Poles would be less demanding in this regard than their parents or grandparents.

In the following section I attempt to outline in brief some of the main cultural traditions and ceremonies observed by the Poles in Britain. The traditions vary in a number of senses. In the first place they vary in their range between those which are household customs, those maintained at parish or local community level, and those which involve wider gatherings of Poles. Second, they vary in their content: some are

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Some of the passages in this chapter are taken from an earlier work on the Polish community: K. Sword, 'Ethnic Identity and Association among Polish Émigrés in a British Town', PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 1982, ch. 6.

<sup>1</sup> In my early contacts with the Polish community in the late 1970s I was once invited, as the only 'non-Pole', to a Polish Bonfire Night party!



intimately linked to the Church calendar and religious observances, while others are national days of celebration or commemoration and have a more secular-patriotic character.

Inevitably, given the social composition and ethos of the original settlement population, the cultural tradition of the Polish community involves an amalgam of what scholars of peasant societies, following Robert Redfield, have described as 'the great tradition of the reflective few' and 'the little tradition of the unreflective many'.

### *Religious Festivals*

The first of the cultural markers is *Wigilia* (the vigil) or Christmas Eve supper. Probably nothing illustrates the traditional links between the Roman Catholic Church in Poland and the domestic family unit better than the *Wigilia* supper. It emphasizes the way in which the idiom of religious belief and practice permeated the life of rural Poland. The occasion is a celebration which is deeply rooted in the national religious tradition, yet it also serves to deepen and strengthen the bonds of family, kin and community.

Food, feasting and the breaking of bread have of course strong religious connotations which go back thousands of years. Jewish families have celebrated the Passover dinner since they were spared from the Angel of Death some three millenia ago. Christ began his ministry at a wedding feast and ended it at a supper of bread and wine. During the period of Ramadan Muslim families meet for the *fitr*, the breaking of the fast, when all the family comes together, friends are invited, and custom demands that the stranger is not turned away. In most societies families observe important life-cycle events by sharing food with friends. This is how the bonds of kinship and friendship are strengthened.

In Polish tradition the *Wigilia* supper is the main Christmas meal — there is no tradition of turkey or goose for consumption on Christmas Day. (Although Poles in Britain often enjoy the best of both worlds, their traditional supper on Christmas Eve being followed by a British dinner the following day.) According to some scholars it is an adaptation of a Slavic pagan ritual which was practised at the beginning of winter. In Polish Christian usage, it forms a crowning of the expectation and an initial experience of the mystery surrounding the Incarnation. Traditionally fasting took place from the morning, when preparations were being made, until the evening meal, and food was only to be taken when the first evening star appeared. The *Wigilia* supper is both a religious event and a warm family occasion. Family members will make great efforts to be together for this one occasion in the year.

The family grouping around the *Wigilia* table is very much the image of the domestic church as it must have been in early Christian times. Candles are lit and a plate of *opłatki* (holy wafers) are passed round to

those present. These have been baked within the parish and distributed to parishioners. They are usually imprinted with a biblical scene (commonly the Madonna and Child). The custom is then to circulate among those present with the *opłatek* wafer in one hand, offering it to one's neighbour, while at the same time breaking off a piece of theirs. Handshakes, kisses and greetings for the coming year are exchanged, and the piece of wafer obtained from the neighbour is placed on the tongue and swallowed. One moves round the table greeting all present in this fashion. In the more religiously observant households there may be readings from the bible and the singing of hymns.

On sitting down at the table one notices two things. The first is that there is straw on the table (symbolizing the manger in which Christ was born), while the second is an empty chair and extra place-setting. Polish sources differ on the reason for this extra place. Some claim that it is a tradition generally observed in Poland to honour the dead. Others maintain that it is there to remind participants that the Christian is always ready to aid the needy. Yet others see the place as reserved for the unexpected guest or traveller. This is the point at which religious tradition shades off into folklore and superstition. On one occasion, for example, arriving with my wife and daughter at a friend's house on Christmas Eve for Wigilia, I was ushered forward to cross the threshold in front of them. It was explained to me that where there are unmarried girls within the house, it is considered lucky if a man enters first ('lucky' in the sense that the girls will find husbands).

The meal itself does not include any meat. Most dishes are composed of fish or vegetables, or indeed of sweet concoctions. Traditionally there are twelve courses, this representing the number of the Apostles while at the same time endowing the occasion with undertones of the Last Supper. However, few Polish families go to the trouble of preparing this number; most being happy to make do with four or five. The dishes may include *śledź* (pickled herring) with cream, *barszcz* (beetroot soup), *pierogi* (similar to ravioli, but on this occasion with a cheese or cabbage filling rather than meat), mushrooms and cabbage. A main course will often consist of freshwater fish such as carp, pike or tench fried in breadcrumbs. To conclude the meal there may be a dish such as *kutja* which originates from the east of Poland and is a sweet combination of wheat, poppy seed and honey. There is no prescriptive Wigilia menu for Poland as a whole; each Polish region seems to have developed its own culinary traditions within the wider format that Wigilia presents. In the conditions of exile there has been a great deal of borrowing and in any one household one will often find dishes from different regions being served.

The symbolic and ideological significance of the ritual is important. From the point of view of Catholic dogma and practice the parallels with the Eucharist are most striking, since it is during this sacrament that the wafers (*opłatki*) are distributed to the faithful and the miracle of



transubstantiation is held to take place. The Eucharist, unlike life-cycle rituals such as baptism and marriage, is a repetitive act. It is a communion that is performed regularly by practising Catholics and entails a weekly, or even daily, confirmation of their faith and allegiance. It is also intimately connected with the death of Christ himself, being instituted at the Last Supper. Thus the family Wigilia not only replicates the functions of the Eucharist celebration in the home, it infuses the Eucharist with an added dimension of meaning since it more closely follows the occasion which provided the pattern for both: the Last Supper. The symbolism of the twelve courses (although, as I have indicated, rarely followed in practice) and the lighting of the candles has a value as clear as that of the wafers.

It may seem inconsistent or even bizarre that a ceremony which reminds worshippers of the death of Christ and his last hours should take place at the very time of year when Christians are thinking about celebrating his birth. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. A central part of the Christian message is contained in the news of the resurrection, and the elision of death and rebirth is a common one in Christian symbolism, as indeed it is in other religious traditions. Here the message of renewal is being celebrated in a household setting, signifying the reproduction also of the domestic church in a physical and spiritual sense.

The creation of a domestic church in such a literal manner has other implications. The Wigilia supper in effect democratizes the ritual aspects of the Eucharist, dispensing with the mediating role of the priest. In such a strongly hierarchical religious tradition as Roman Catholicism this is not without significance. Clearly such a household practice of religious ritual is of immense value where the observance of a national religious tradition has been proscribed and driven underground by occupying forces. But it also lends itself to the maintenance of national religious traditions amongst a minority whose members may be dispersed and infrequently in contact. Hence, even though most Poles in towns and cities will attend *pasterka* (Polish midnight mass) after the Wigilia on Christmas Eve, for some it may be impossible: the distances involved in travelling to the Polish church are perhaps too far. The course adopted may be to attend an English mass. In either case the Wigilia supper fulfils an important role. First, in the absence of the priest it replicates the physical act of communion. Second, it has an ethnic boundary-marking function: in observing these and other purely Polish traditions, which are not followed by English or Irish Catholics, Poles re-emphasize the link between their religion and purely national traditions.

The ceremonial exchange of wafers which takes place prior to the Wigilia supper has its more public counterpart outside the domestic setting. An *Oplątek* (the name for the wafer is given to the occasion) may be arranged by individual community organizations for members and friends, and involves a wider degree of solidarity and strengthening of

social bonds without involving the whole community. We might say that it fulfils an intermediate function in this respect. Thus the Combatants' group or the Scouting group may have their own *Oplątek*. When an occasion such as this takes place, some food is provided and often some form of entertainment put on for guests. At a particular juncture in the proceedings, and with the participation of the priest (whose presence is required on this occasion), there begins a circulation of people exchanging wafers and greetings, moving around and intermingling very much as the family does during the Christmas Eve Wigilia. The community *Oplątki* are usually held in the weeks after Christmas, however. The members present may vary from several dozen to several hundred.

When Poles of the second generation claim that they maintain the traditions, it is clear that Wigilia is one of the traditions they mean. There is an oft-expressed wish to pass such traditions on to their children, and pride is expressed in the uniqueness of the Christmas Eve supper and its accompaniment of ritual. However, it is not clear in all households to what extent the tradition is being maintained by members of the second generation for their children, and to what extent it is the grandparents whose efforts are being directed to ensure cultural continuity.

An equally distinctive Polish tradition takes place at Easter (*Wielkanoc*) when the household is cleaned thoroughly and prepared for the main meal on Easter Saturday. Good Friday is of course a day of fasting, and for children is given over to painting and decorating eggs (*pisanki*). On Easter Saturday a basket is symbolically filled with items of food — a piece of bread, a piece of ham or sausage, egg, salt, pepper, cake — which are covered with an embroidered cloth. The whole family then walks to church with the basket. There, at midday, the baskets are laid together before the altar and the priest, in a short ceremony (known as *święcone*), blesses the food offering and the congregation, showering them with holy water. Following the *święcone* ceremony the family then return to consume the accumulated hoard of food, which the hours of abstinence have rendered even more alluring. The symbolism of the occasion needs little explanation. Eggs have long been widely employed as a symbol of renewal (of new life) in the Christian world, and the tradition of painting eggs is widespread in the Slavic world and beyond. The blessing of food at this time of year indicates the existence of earlier pagan fertility rituals linked to the sowing of crops and the desire for a bountiful harvest. But once again it is a ritual which is regarded as peculiarly Polish, as being unknown to other nations (especially British Catholics), and in that sense acts as a boundary marker.

As with many of these ritual observances (and this is true for other faiths and cultures such as Judaism), their strength lies in the emotional connotations which they hold. They are associated with the family, with one's earliest childhood memories, with one's first words, one's first steps, one's first meals. They bind the individual and anchor him or her in



a particular cultural past. But problems in cultural continuity are caused by mixed marriages. Women, as wives and mothers, are the main bearers and transmitters of such cultural traditions. Food preparation, in particular, is generally their preserve. Marriage between Polish males and non-Polish wives generally means that, over time, such traditions are lost. If the wife is Polish, the tendency to maintain such traditions is stronger when she is from Poland. It is less strong where she is British-born, but may be reinforced where parents or in-laws are co-resident or in close proximity.

Moving through the religious calendar, the festival of *Boże Ciało* (Corpus Christi) has greater significance in Poland than in non-Catholic Britain. It is a national holiday and the occasion of solemn processions conducted around the parish by the priest.<sup>2</sup> Since Corpus Christi is not a national holiday in Britain, it is difficult for the Poles as a community to celebrate the occasion in the same way, although records show that such processions took place in the resettlement camps in the late 1940s and 1950s and in urban settings such as Manchester and south London. In the postwar decades, though, the significance of Corpus Christi as a public festival has declined. If anything it has been supplanted in the Polish calendar by Pentecost (*Zielone Świątki*) which generally falls during the British Whitsuntide break. At Whit weekend thousands of Poles from all over the country travel to Fawley Court, a riverside estate near Henley, once the site of a Polish boys' boarding school and still run by the Marian Fathers, an order of Polish priests. Although a mass is celebrated, the occasion is not a solemn one. There are usually a number of stalls selling a range of items from food to books. Various entertainments are on offer which may include dance groups and theatre groups. Above all it is a chance to meet friends and relatives from other Polish communities in an idyllic rural setting.

Other celebrations include *Dożynki*, the Polish harvest festival, which, apart from receiving recognition in formal setting at mass, is also customarily the occasion for dances and balls in local communities. But a ceremony which is quintessentially Polish is *Zaduszki* (All Souls) in which flowers are laid and candles lit on the graves of departed relatives. This takes place in the evening, and falling as it does at the end of October when days are drawing in, it often has a mournful and atmospheric effect. The priest circles the cemetery at the head of a procession, the altar boys immediately following him. As he goes he blesses in turn the graves which have been prepared and decorated.

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<sup>2</sup> In the city of Kraków, a major procession traditionally took place from the Wawel Royal Cathedral to the city's market square, where a mass took place in front of the ancient church of St Mary. This procession was banned in the postwar period by the communists and was only resumed in 1979 when the Cardinal of Kraków became Pope John Paul II. The Kraków procession involves priests, monks, and nuns from various orders in southern Poland, all in their distinctive vestments and bearing icons.

*Zaduszki*, like Easter and Christmas, is a family occasion. As in Poland, family members are often prepared to travel long distances to return home for the occasion. Here in Britain, of course, it is a time when the reunion of individual families coincides with a gathering of the community. Once again, as on other feast days, the solidarity and closeness of the domestic unit is emphasized, as it pays homage to lost members. At the same time its role as a culture-bearing and culture-transmitting unit within the wider unity of the church is emphasized.

### *Polish Food*

Food has been described as 'the last bastion of ethnicity'. It is true that the names of food and food dishes are often the only words of Polish remembered by third or fourth generation Polish immigrants in the United States. In Britain, however, Polish food traditions seem under threat and in many households are only being maintained by the *babcia* (grandmother) or by the female family members who visit periodically from Poland. One young wife confided that she attempted to cook Polish food periodically and that her young children 'loved *pierogi*, *gotąbki*, *kielbasy*, etc....' They were, she ventured, probably more adventurous and better eaters as a result. She did not mention, although she might have done, homemade soups or sweet favourites such as *makowiec* (poppy seed cake), *sernik* (cheesecake), *charlotka* (apple cake) or *pączki* (Polish doughnuts).

It is not so many years since most sizeable Polish communities could turn to at least one East European (usually Polish) delicatessen. These have now largely disappeared as Polish businesses, except in areas of London. This is mainly because their owners have retired and the younger generation Poles have not displayed an interest in taking them over. But it is also partly because the food habits of native Britons have changed since the 1950s, becoming more cosmopolitan. Every small town now has its Chinese, Indian and possibly Italian restaurant. Delicatessens and specialist food stores now cater for the domestic palate, as well as for that of immigrant minorities. Indeed in the 1990s almost every supermarket now seems to have its delicatessen counter where one can buy Polish-style *kabanos*, or *wiejska*, or *żywiecka* sausages.

The abiding impression is that for the younger generation, although the old favourites such as *pierogi* and *gotąbki* are fondly remembered from childhood, the time and effort involved in the preparation of such dishes means that they are only rare treats. A more pressured lifestyle and the availability of convenience foods have made their mark.



*National Commemorative Days*

The second main group of traditions relate not to religious festivals but to days of national commemoration, marking historical events which are the occasion for national pride and rejoicing or national mourning.

The first in the calendar is 3 May, the anniversary of the 1791 Constitution. Poles are extremely proud that their country provided Europe with its first Constitution, some two years before the French (and only two years after the American Constitution was adopted). Pride is always mixed with sadness though, since the efforts of the Polish King, Stanisław August, to reform the body politic were too late: Poland could not avoid being partitioned by its neighbours. In postwar Britain, the commemoration of the Constitution had other functions. It sent a message of defiance to the communist authorities in Warsaw who, while not going so far as to erase the Constitution from the history books, had nevertheless chosen to commemorate 1 May as a holiday (International Labour Day).

While the British Poles, in conditions of exile, could not order a national holiday, they did the next best thing. The nearest Sunday was earmarked to commemorate the occasion and an *akademia* was (and is still) held. An *akademia* is a show or entertainment, usually with a message. It consists of several theatrical sketches, dances and musical events around a common theme. An *akademia* in the local Polish community will usually involve children from the Saturday school classes, each class presenting a sketch which has been carefully rehearsed over preceding weeks with the teacher. The sketch portrays events from Polish history.

Similar *akademie* (plural) are organized within the community to commemorate the second of the major dates in the nation's calendar of significant events: 11 November, Independence Day. It was on 11 November 1918 that Pilsudski took power in Warsaw following the First World War; Poland regained her independence after 123 years of partition. Again, this date provided something of a boundary marker with communist Poland. The communist authorities, although they could not but welcome independence, were reluctant to give it too much prominence, (a) because it provided an outlet for anti-Russian sentiment (Russia having been one of the partitioning powers); (b) because they were reluctant to give the achievements of Pilsudski too much prominence; and (c) because there was potentially a continuing reminder that Poland was once again under Moscow's yoke. Again, it was not a date erased from the history books, but was one that tended to be played down by the communist powers in favour of other anniversaries. As Norman Davies has observed, the state-controlled media gave prominence to the 7–8 November anniversaries of the Russian

Revolution and of the Daszyński Government in Lublin (1918).<sup>3</sup> As regards liberation the postwar communist authorities in Poland preferred to celebrate the anniversary of the July Manifesto (after which countless streets in Polish towns were named), symbolizing the liberation of Poland in 1945 by the Red Army and the arrival of people's power (in the form of the Lublin Committee) on Polish soil. Naturally, mention of the July Manifesto evoked anger and indignation in the ranks of the exiles.

In this way each of the ideological camps sought to emphasize particular historical events and, by so doing, to claim legitimacy for their particular interpretation of Polish history and ultimately for their social philosophy.

The commemoration of these anniversaries by *akademie* has a number of functions. Clearly it has served to keep historical awareness alive in people's minds, reminding the exiles and their children about the Polish nation's triumphs and its tribulations. It also provided an event around which opposition and defiance to the communist authorities in Poland could be shown a determination to preserve the memory of Poland's past as it should be remembered, and not as the communists would have liked to deform it. In nationalist struggles — and the struggle of the Polish émigrés was seen very much in those terms, as a struggle against Moscow for the soul of the Polish nation — history, as we have learnt, takes on an enormous importance. How historical events are portrayed has a great part in determining our sense of self-worth and self-esteem, how we see ourselves, how we rank ourselves in regard to our neighbours, and who we regard as our allies and who our historic enemies.

There are further anniversaries which were regarded by the exiled soldier generation of Poles as important and were the occasion for special masses or parades and commemorative meetings. One, quite naturally, is Soldiers' Day (*Dzień Żołnierza*) on 15 August.<sup>4</sup> The SPK (Ex-Combatants' Association) is usually instrumental in arranging events at local and regional level to commemorate this day. Other significant dates in the calendar of the exile community have been 1 September (anniversary of Hitler's attack on Poland in 1939), 17 September (the Soviet 'stab in the back' of 1939 when the Red Army entered Poland), and 1 August (outbreak of the Warsaw Rising). Like these, the other major battles in which Polish troops were involved during the Second World War (Narvik, Tobruk, Falaise, Monte Cassino, Bologna, Ancona) are commemorated in writing (articles in the press and magazines) rather

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<sup>3</sup> N. Davies, *God's Playground, A History of Poland*, New York, 1984, vol. 1, p. xvi.

<sup>4</sup> This is the anniversary of the day on which Tukhachevskii's troops were routed from the gates of Warsaw in 1920, the turning point of a conflict in which the Bolshevik forces were eventually routed. It was the decisive moment of what Lord D'Abernon termed one of the eighteen most important battles of world history.



than major social events. With the passage of time and the reduction in numbers of the older generation, it seems likely that there will be less attention devoted to such events; they will take a normal place in the annals of Polish history.

A recent addition to these anniversaries was 13 December, the date on which martial law was declared in Poland. For the émigrés it was a day for demonstrations in front of the Polish Embassy in an attempt to keep the realities of the communist regime in the forefront of British public opinion.<sup>5</sup> By the 1980s, however, few Poles in this country were politically active in this sense. Most were too comfortable, with comfortable life styles and middle-class values. The idea of taking part in street demonstrations was alien to them. It was a concept they associated with a different generation and a different class.

This has been a cursory review of some prominent aspects of the culture and traditions of Poles in Britain. It is a by no means exhaustive picture of a rich and varied tapestry of culture. Two things should be borne in mind, however. The first is, as sociologist Robert Merton once observed, rituals which are intended to function in an integrative way — to bind the group together — can sometimes be dysfunctional. The Polish community *akademie* are a case in point, since taking part during childhood has remained as a negative rather than a positive memory in the minds of many younger-generation Poles.

Second is the perhaps obvious point that examination of culture and ritual can reveal changes as well as continuities. For example, while life-cycle rituals are similar to those of the British community (there is little evidence of the three-day-long wedding celebrations which used to occur in Poland), British-born Poles for the most part celebrate their birthdays rather than, as in Poland, their name-days (*imieniny*). Material and decorative culture is a striking characteristic of many Polish homes, but the tendency to display Krosno glassware, traditional 'peasant' carvings, a *kilim* (decorative weaving) or *wycinanki* (decorative paper cut-outs) is more noticeable in the living-rooms of the older generation than those of younger, British-born Poles. Differences in 'informal' or 'intimate' culture — values, assumptions, gestures and behavioural traits — are numerous. Some of these are evident in the chapter that follows.

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<sup>5</sup> G. Hart (ed.), *For Our Freedom and Yours. A History of the Polish Solidarity Campaign of Great Britain 1980–1994*, London, 1995.

## 8 Upbringing, Identity and Community

### *Family Background and Historical Awareness*

Ethnicity, as George Devos has written, is in its narrowest sense a feeling of continuity with the past. It is also intimately related to the need for collective continuity:

The individual senses to some degree a threat to his own survival if his group or lineage is threatened with extinction. Ethnicity, therefore, includes a sense of personal survival in the historical continuity of the group. For this reason failure to remain in the group leads to feelings of guilt. It is a form of killing inflicted on one's progenitors, including one's parents, who still 'live' as long as some symbols of their culture are carried forth into the present and future....<sup>1</sup>

For ethnic and national minority groups, especially where oppression, loss and exile form part of their background, the pressure for continuity — the maintenance of identity, culture, traditions — may become overpowering. History assumes a significance which to outsiders may seem incomprehensible. The immediacy of historical events, the way in which they are commemorated — often with fervour and implied defiance of the traditional foe — may defy rational explanation. Whether the events occurred thirty years before, within living memory, or three hundred years in the past seldom makes a difference. The group in question may act through a persistent sense of deprivation or injustice, but the consequence of its commemorative action is both exclusive — to emphasize social boundaries (i.e. demarcating 'our people' from 'the outsiders'), and inclusive — to strengthen the group's social bonds and sense of belonging.

This process, moreover, as Epstein observes, can be selective: 'the richer the historical fabric, the greater the potential for selection and reinterpretation while yet maintaining the sense of continuity'.<sup>2</sup> The historical tradition can be, and often is, manipulated or massaged by the intellectuals in order to serve group ends — to boost pride and the sense of self-worth that is essential if group affiliation is to prove attractive to

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<sup>1</sup> G. Devos and L. Romanucci-Ross, *Ethnic Identity. Cultural Continuity and Change*, Palo Alto, 1975, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> A.L. Epstein, *Ethos and Identity. Three Studies in Ethnicity*, London/Chicago, 1978, p. 122.



the individual. Often in such a process the martial tradition is emphasized, feats of arms of the ancestors engender a justifiable pride and calls for loyalty to the cause, and further sacrifices are made to maintain the tradition and pass on further feats to future generations. This is certainly true in the Polish case. As Tadeusz Radzialowski has written, 'Every Pole carries as part of his psychic baggage at least a vague idea of the martyrdom of Poland (however he might choose to explain it); of brave warriors and tragic, bloody defeat.'<sup>3</sup> The use of ritual celebrations to commemorate significant religious feast days and national anniversaries is widely practised in the Polish community. The calendar of events includes more general historical landmarks, but also events which are specific to the political émigrés of the war and postwar years. Following on from this it might seem likely that a political exile minority such as the Poles would instil in their children a deep familiarity with their past travails; in particular, that they would have a detailed knowledge of their recent history.

Questioning young people of Polish origin about family history was intended to elicit such background information not only for its own sake, but also — and just as importantly — to determine the degree of knowledge and interest that respondents demonstrated in their parents' past and (implicitly) in the reasons for their own presence on British, rather than Polish, soil. The responses were fascinating, not just because of the varied accounts of wartime peregrinations, but also because in some cases they indicated the rather limited knowledge which many younger Poles seem to have about the history of modern Poland, the history of the *emigracja*, and even of their own family's history.

This generalization should be tempered with the observation that a small number of individuals had a knowledge of Polish history and family history which was impressive. A small number of London-based respondents had connections with the General Sikorski Historical Institute. Others, including some in the provinces, had a developed knowledge of family history which included claims to property confiscated by the communists. A frequent response was to admit that the respondent had only a 'vague notion' of how his or her parents had arrived in Britain. For example one young mother in Coventry confided that her parents had been reluctant to speak about their wartime experiences and she could not remember by what route they had come to Britain:

Funnily enough my parents didn't particularly speak about it.... In fact they didn't speak very much about the war at all. I think you get some Polish families like this.... It's so long since I was told this that I can't remember exactly. To my parents it was a part of their lives that they wanted to forget in a way.... And yet there were other families we used to visit, other people who

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<sup>3</sup> T. Radzialowski, 'The View from a Polish Ghetto', *Ethnicity*, vol. 1, 1974, no. 2, p. 130.

would talk about nothing *but* the war.... But my parents weren't like that and I don't know why.<sup>4</sup>

Another female informant confirmed from her childhood experience that older members of the community would withhold information about their wartime experiences: 'You ask your parents what they did in the war and they don't tell you, so you fantasize...'.<sup>5</sup> Another respondent, a man in his forties from Melton Mowbray, knew that his father had been born somewhere near Warsaw, but was vague about his pre-war employment and about how he had arrived in England: 'It never occurred to me to question him about this...'.<sup>6</sup> Yet another contributor, a mother in her forties, confessed that now her parents were dead she regretted not having sat them down and said, 'Look, tell us how this really happened....' She had, she said, only a vague notion of the routes her parents followed and the sequence of events. And yet in the course of the same interview, seeming to contradict herself, she claimed to have been upset by the harrowing stories her mother told her as a young girl about her experience of deportation to Siberia.<sup>7</sup> I concluded from this that the mother had broached the subject when the daughter was too young to be able to deal with it, and that thereafter the subject either became taboo, or else the daughter had refused to take in further information on the subject.

Others betrayed a lack of precision in their attempts to answer the question, which reflected perhaps the half-absorbed, half-remembered stories of their childhood years. One woman recalled that her father had come to England 'with the paratroopers'. She confessed that she had not taken much interest in the history of Polish arms during World War II '... although they have had a lot of reunions lately'.<sup>8</sup> Another woman told me that her father's elder brother 'died during the war in Poland — at Monte Cassino...'.<sup>9</sup> (Cassino, where troops of the Polish Second Corps fought during World War II, is of course in Italy.)

It was evident that the parents' backgrounds varied greatly. They came from a wide spread of geographical locations in Poland and a range of occupations. As one would expect, many respondents had at least one parent from eastern Poland who had come to Britain following deportation to the USSR in 1940. Some of these parents though had been children at the time and had arrived via refugee camps in East Africa and India. Other parents had come via Germany, having spent all or part of the war there as prisoners of war, forced labourers or involuntary recruits to the *Wehrmacht*. Several parents, mostly based in

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4 Tape B/11/TK.

5 Notes from telephone conversation with 'HS' (Scotland), 15 September 1993.

6 Tape B/10/WJ.

7 Tape B/15/BM.

8 Tape B/7/KD.

9 Tape B/1/HA.



the Midlands and North, had arrived as European Voluntary Workers, recruited to work in British industry in the late 1940s. One or two mentioned that their parents had spent the war in Poland and had been active in the underground Home Army. 'Waldek' in Manchester mentioned that his father had been fifteen and his mother nine when the war broke out and both had taken part in the Warsaw Rising. They had been held by the Germans at Oberlangen camp following the collapse of the Warsaw Rising, making their way to Britain by two different, circuitous routes — in the mother's case via the Middle East.<sup>10</sup>

The disjunction and hardship caused by the war had resulted in some strange family circumstances. 'Bronia' from one of the smaller Midlands communities, although born in Britain, had a sister some eighteen years older than her who had been born in Poland before the war. Many members of her family had died in the Soviet Union or, following the evacuations from Soviet territory in 1942, had died in Iran. Her sister had made her exit from the Soviet Union so weak and undernourished that eventually she had had to learn to walk all over again. Interestingly, Bronia's niece (her sister's daughter) was only four years younger than 'Bronia' herself. The two women were now both married and the couples had become best friends.<sup>11</sup>

In a number of cases questions about siblings and their whereabouts brought painful responses. 'Bogus' in Manchester, when asked if he was the eldest in the family, replied in the negative: he had had two elder brothers born before the war. But both had died following deportation to the Soviet Union. One had been born in the cattle trucks during the deportation operation and died on the journey, while the other died in 1942 following the evacuation to Iran, having drunk contaminated water and contracted typhoid.<sup>12</sup> London-based 'Adriana' had also lost a sister in Russia during the war. Her parents had eventually been reunited in Palestine where a further sister was born.<sup>13</sup> Several stories were recounted of family separation and reunion — of parents separated in the Soviet Union and being reunited once again in Iran or Palestine. Or of relatives being separated during forced labour in Germany and meeting by accident in the same DP camp.

Some marriage unions in the parents' generation had been contracted after the war. One woman related how her father had been captured during the September campaign in Poland and held in a German prisoner-of-war camp for six years. On arrival in Britain, wanting to find a wife who was both Polish and Roman Catholic, he had advertised through the 'matrimonial' columns of the Polish émigré press. The

<sup>10</sup> Notes from interview with 'W.K.' (Manchester), 29 March 1993.

<sup>11</sup> Notes from interview with 'D.L.' (Melton), 18 September 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Tape B/6/BB. For background to the fate of Poles in the Soviet Union during the war years, see; K. Sword, *Deportation and Exile. Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939–48*, London, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Tape B/21/AS.

woman he eventually married was from Lwów in eastern Poland and had taken the wartime route to Britain which led through the Soviet Union, Iran and the Middle East. The union resulted in five children!<sup>14</sup>

Apart from those parents who had been married before the war and those who met and married in the course of the 1940s, there was a third group — those who married after 1956. Often these marriages involved a considerable age gap. In all cases they involved mothers who had arrived in Britain in the late 1950s or 1960s, marrying into the existing community.<sup>15</sup>

Inevitably in recounting the careers of family members, references were made to the difficulties of the early years in Britain, the parents' employment history and early memories of camp life. One young man (in his thirties) from west London, revealed in a matter-of-fact tone that his grandfather, a former general in the Polish Army and assistant to the Polish Chief of Staff, became a washer-up in the Dorchester Hotel for a number of years.<sup>16</sup> In this particular family, the father had displayed consummate entrepreneurial skills, developing a successful business supplying delicatessens and becoming one of the most successful businessmen in the Polish community. 'Jacek', a schoolteacher who grew up in the Bradford community, recalled that his mother had worked as a seamstress in the early days, when they had not been very well-off, and that most of his clothes had been sewn by his mother. Indeed, he continued, he remembered that on his first visit to Poland (in 1958, aged eleven) he had worn his school uniform since it was the smartest outfit he had!<sup>17</sup>

On rare occasions the recounting of family history provoked indignation, particularly in cases where educated parents had suffered 'declassment'. For example a respondent informed me that his father, having left his 'responsible' job in the army, and suffering the effects of war injuries, had been compelled to take a first job sweeping up in a railway station. Only later had he been able to undertake further training and become a draughtsman. The son's account revealed a deeply-felt sense of resentment at what his father had undergone, and what he perceived to be the poor treatment the Poles received at British hands. Such indignation was rarely as specific as this, although most seemed to take it as given that the Poles in general had been let down by the postwar settlement. It was not a subject which provoked a great deal of emotion, being discussed in matter-of-fact terms.<sup>18</sup>

The passing on of family experiences and historical knowledge is, admittedly, only one of the ways in which ethnic identity is transmitted. Yet some awareness of historical tradition — of the collective past — is

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14 Tape B/3/BB.

15 Tape B/26/AR, Tape B/16/PP.

16 Tape B/26/AR.

17 Tape B/17/JP.

18 Tape B/14/BK.



crucial if the individual is to become aware of his or her own origins. In turn a positive sense of group identity invests the individual with a sense of self-esteem.

However, the teaching of wartime Polish history seems to have encountered difficulties. The attempt to set up a 'living history' project within one Polish school — which would have involved parents and grandparents — had fallen through due to opposition from the parents:

What amazed me was the total reluctance to do that... I was most disappointed that I could not persuade people to have maps on the wall, showing the routes of certain parents, showing how certain incidents in history that they would probably be taught in school could relate to their lives. There was this total block. I couldn't understand it.<sup>19</sup>

It is impossible to elicit the reasons for this opposition, but many wartime events have remained controversial and still spark lively debate in exile circles. The boycott may have been due to a suspicion about motives and a refusal to believe that the story can be told properly by others. For many younger-generation Poles the relevance of recent Polish history to their current lives is limited. They have been excited by the election of a Polish Pope, by the rise of Solidarity and by the eventual collapse of communism. But their parents' history is more often than not a story of personal pain and national tragedy. It is remote in space and time and not immediately relevant to their present lives. Unlike exile groups such as the Palestinians, many of whom experience a continuing disadvantage as a result of their uprooting and exile, the Poles have prospered. In material terms the younger generation has benefited from their parents' relocation. There has been little incentive therefore for them to mull over old defeats, since their lives were clearly going to be spent in their adopted homeland.

Nevertheless if knowledge of their parents' wartime odysseys is weak in many cases, the attitudes of many of the younger generation have been shaped indirectly by their parents' experience of resettlement in Britain. They centre on the hardship borne by parents and grandparents in adjusting to new conditions of exile in Britain. There is pride expressed in the achievements of the parents' generation — but as much in their discipline and hard work, in having uncomplainingly made a success out of adversity, as in any military exploits.

### *Childhood and Upbringing in the Polish Community*

The earliest memories of the oldest second-generation respondents were of the postwar resettlement camps, although these were often somewhat hazy.

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<sup>19</sup> Tape B/15/BM.

I was seven when we left the camp and I can still remember bits and pieces of it. The vast fields and just being able to go out and play and do anything you wanted to in the grass all around. And again I remember *Zielone Swiętki* when all the children — the girls especially — had got a tray on a ribbon filled with flower petals. And we used to go in procession to the church and throw the petals as we went along.<sup>20</sup>

This nostalgic childhood reminiscence is to Husbands Bosworth camp, near Market Harborough. The point was, as 'Kasia' (a mother from Leicester) continued, that it was a self-enclosed little world and self-sufficient in many respects. Many of her relatives, including grandparents, were there and the camp boasted a nursery school, a church and other facilities. There was no need, she said, to leave the camp for anything except shopping. (An exaggeration, of course, since her elders would have had to leave to work or to go to senior schools.)

Although many look back to the camp period with some sentiment, there was for others a stigma attached to camp residence. One interviewee, now a grandmother, who had been at the Marsworth camp (near Tring) as a young girl stressed the sense of stigma she felt about living in the camp. At that age she felt set apart and different from her English schoolfriends. Indeed she was so ashamed of her background that not only did she avoid inviting friends home, but even left out the word 'camp' from her address when writing letters. In those days (late 1940s and 1950s), she said, being Polish meant being something inferior in British eyes, and this low evaluation was accepted by many Poles. However, she continued defensively, most of the English people they came across had very little reason to feel culturally superior, since they were ignorant, culturally limited and had very narrow horizons!<sup>21</sup>

Another respondent who remembers the Husband's Bosworth camp, recalls that his family was the first to leave the camp. They were allocated a council house in Rugby, but did not take it, preferring to buy their own.<sup>22</sup> Although the Poles, when they moved out of the camps, were often buying property in the cheaper, run-down areas of the town or city, the drive towards property ownership was strong. As one respondent put it, 'Poles bought their own homes ... they did not get any help. They are a proud people.'<sup>23</sup> Multi-occupancy, cramming in relatives or paying lodgers was a common feature of Polish community life, until family finances improved.

Some Poles rented accommodation, but there were frequently difficulties with English landladies who more often than not would not accept children. For this reason 'Janina Z.' spent her first two years apart from her parents, being cared for in a nursery before her parents moved to the North and they were able to live together as a family. This

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20 Tape B/7/KD.

21 Notes from conversation with Mrs U.Z. (Brighton), 15 January 1994.

22 Tape B/15/GM.

23 Tape B/22/BT.



early experience had the curious effect that, unlike most of her contemporaries, she learnt the English language first, from her nurses, before acquiring Polish from closer contact with her parents after the age of three. (Naturally, when she went to English school at the age of five, she had to relearn English.)<sup>24</sup>

The move out of the camps into urban surroundings, and the general level of movement which took place in the early years inevitably weakened the bonds of community which had existed in the 'closed centres'. Nevertheless these ties were often restored surprisingly quickly, particularly in some of the more compact communities of the Midlands and North. Poles naturally felt themselves to be outsiders *vis-à-vis* British society, and, despite being a 'white' minority, they experienced a level of social and professional discrimination which might seem surprising to those brought up in the more tolerant, cosmopolitan atmosphere of post-1960s Britain. As older generation Poles frequently observe with some irony: 'We were not only "foreigners", we were "bloody foreigners".'

Like so many migrants, most Poles arriving in the 1940s lacked the language skills and the confidence to be able to mix freely and in a relaxed way with the natives and so they turned to each other for support and social life. Many also became dependent upon their children with the inversion of roles and competences which is characteristic of first-generation immigrants or settlers. The failure of parents to learn sufficient English and the need for children to help them fill in forms was mentioned by several informants. 'Halina', brought up in Greater Manchester, said that the difficulties of having two Polish-speaking parents and, as an only child, having always to be the interpreter meant that she had to mature at an early age and learn to shoulder responsibility. Such was her parents' complex about the use of English that they had arranged for the telephone to be taken out because too many English people called. 'Halina' herself confessed she was pleased her own daughter, being brought up in Britain, would have a 'normal' life and would not have to shoulder such responsibility.<sup>25</sup>

With the organizational development of the community came divisions; these might arise as a result of educational background, military rank, wartime experiences or geographical origins. Other divisions resulted from the speed with which some found their feet in British society and prospered. One respondent recalled that in the northern town of his childhood the main class division within the Polish community existed between those who had their own business and those who engaged in factory work. Class aspirations and sensitivities, whether based on former position in prewar Poland, or on newfound

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24 Tape B/37/JL.

25 Notes from interview with H. Scott (Edinburgh), 16 July 1993.

position in postwar Britain, could have a detrimental effect on community solidarity:

I was totally enveloped by Polish culture and I stood out at school because of this ... because I was totally enveloped in Polish culture and in that particular sort of culture which was like a *zaścianek* (provincial gentry) in that my parents had a very narrow circle of friends and most of the people in our town were regarded by my mother as not the kind of people we would speak to....<sup>26</sup>

Another informant from west London indicated how the class aspirations of the more educated Poles and their ambition for their children drove them to integrate into British society:

I come from a family which regarded itself as 'intelligentsia' — so the desire to integrate was greater because you wanted to feel that your being 'intelligentsia' was recognized by other people — particularly the English. And you tended to avoid the peasants. So my family tended to exclude social contact with [her husband's] family. And a priority was to send children to very good schools so that we learned how to mix with English people, in order to have good careers that would gain us the respect my parents felt they had never had in this country.<sup>27</sup>

A frequently expressed view was that 'on the whole' the more educated elements, including the officer class, gravitated to London. It could be difficult for the 'intelligentsia' in the provincial communities, both because so much more was expected of them in terms of community leadership and because they would often find little in the way of a peer group.<sup>28</sup>

Polish community life in the early years was, for many respondents, very circumscribed. Although not exactly a ghetto existence, children found their early lives outside English school filled by Polish activities: Polish school on a Saturday morning, with perhaps folklore, dance and singing as part of the curriculum; and later Polish scouts. On a Sunday morning or lunchtime there would be Polish mass, followed by visits from friends and relatives. 'Halina', recalling her childhood in the Manchester area, stated that in the days before they had a car it had taken two buses to get to Polish mass. Afterwards the men retired to the Polish Club, while the women prepared the dinner.<sup>29</sup> And so a large part of the weekend would be taken up, marked out for social activities within the ethnic community:

I was saturated with a very rich Polish language. My social life was Polish. Our friends that came into the house were Polish. Everything we did — apart from English school, which was from nine until four — oh, and the 'telly' — was Polish. So I was Polish.

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26 Tape B/20/AS.

27 Tape B/33/IM.

28 Tape B/27/EB.

29 Conversation with H. Scott (Edinburgh), 16 July 1993.



But that influence, that outside influence has now eroded. There's not so much, not just for my children, but for anybody else's children... As time has gone on, their Polish world has contracted....<sup>30</sup>

There was an attempt to fill out and occupy the children's spare time, both to foster Polish cultural values and community spirit, but also to avoid unnecessary contact with the host community. As one west London informant put it, 'the prejudice was not all on one side'. I asked in the course of one interview how such a sense of separateness and exclusivity was explained to the children by way of justifying their attendance at Polish Saturday school or in the scouting group? My hosts replied, 'It was like being one of the chosen people among the heathens.' And was there, I asked, a sense of moral, cultural and ideological threat from outside society?

Yes, all that. Mother used the rather derogatory word 'Angol' to refer to the English, in the same way that the term 'Polack' was used contemptuously by Americans. These people [the English] didn't have a faith because they were not Catholics. And if I mixed with them I might lose my faith — so I didn't mix with them.<sup>31</sup>

The Polish minority was also very much what social scientists refer to as a 'moral community', in the sense that there was strong social pressure to conform to acceptable patterns of behaviour; to conduct themselves in dealings with the host community in such a way as to bring credit — and certainly not to bring shame or stigma — on the Polish name. Social control was buttressed in some cases by the strong authority figure of a priest and also by exaggerated fears about possible British sanctions against anyone who stepped out of line:

The priest, Father K., was like an iron hand who kept people together. And he could do this because people finding themselves here from Poland felt totally insecure. Most people thought that if they did something wrong, they would immediately be deported or sent back.<sup>32</sup>

In the early years it was still required for the Poles, as 'aliens', to report to the police regularly. But it seems that there were cases in which the police took it upon themselves to carry out home visits. Another respondent recalled from her childhood years, at the age of five or six years, how the police used to visit the family home every Friday evening, in a routine check on her father. Questions asked included whether her father was still in employment and whether he had paid the rent.<sup>33</sup>

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30 Tape B/15/BM.

31 Tape B/33/MM.

32 Tape B/10/WJ.

33 Notes from interview with H. Scott (Edinburgh), 16 July 1993.

This demanding code of community values was applied to the children: were they acquitting themselves well at school, steering clear of trouble, bringing credit on the family and the community? There was a strong code of discipline and social constraints on any behaviour that was considered anti-social or as not reflecting positively on the ethnic community. This pressure was felt much more by the girls than the boys. As another informant relates:

We used to have *oplatki* parties and you would get the grannies in black and I knew I was in for it the following day; either my hair was too long or my skirt was too short ... you know, I was dancing with the wrong boy.... I can remember my Gran coming down to give me a mouthful about it.<sup>34</sup>

This latter experience was echoed in the words of another female informant who pointed out that in the 1960s, a period when the miniskirt was in fashion, 'English girls could look like that, but Polish girls didn't.' There were, she observed, similar control systems at work within the Asian community. A third female respondent from the Midlands, a young mother with two small children, said of her upbringing and her relationship with her parents:

I'm sure there were arguments ... that it wasn't fair that I couldn't go to the pub in town, or something like that ... to the youth clubs or whatever. My parents at that time had this impression that everybody was out to put some kind of drug in your drink and lead you astray. But things like that would never happen at the Polish Club — there you could be safe!

Did this, I asked, indicate a general distrust of outside society?

Oh, I think so, yes. Because whenever I talked to other girls at the Polish Club we would think our mums had all got together, because they all had the same idea — of someone putting a drug in your drink.<sup>35</sup>

At this juncture it is worth pointing out that if the rather strict, traditional values of the older generation — particularly those from the smaller provincial communities of Eastern Poland — were felt to be endangered by contact with British urban society (and ethnic boundaries were mobilized to meet that danger), how much more threatening was the explosion of the youth counter-culture which took off in the 1960s and achieved lurid headlines in the popular press.

It is necessary to introduce an element of balance into the discussion however. For all the restrictive and confining tendencies of Polish community upbringing, there were benefits to living in a small 'village' community amidst the complexity of urban Britain. Face-to-face contacts and friendships were important for the older generation. But

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34 Tape B/15/BM.

35 Tape B/11/TK.



they are important for any ethnic group in succeeding generations if group culture and ethos are to be maintained.

'Kasia' was involved, like many of her generation, in many Polish activities — Saturday school, the girl scouts, the Catholic youth group (KSMP):

I enjoyed the activities and enjoyed community life because there was a tightly-knit group of us all who were in the Polish school together, in the KSMP together, who did the folk-dancing and partnered each other, who went out to dances in the evenings....<sup>36</sup>

The boys in the group provided an 'escort' for the girls in the group. They went around together, the girls got a lift home, and throughout their teenage years had male friends with whom they had grown up. There was a ready-made social group, particularly important for those who went to single-sex Catholic schools and, she continued, this was a source of envy to English girls at her school.

Upbringing and socialization in this ethnic 'village' reflect those of other ethnic minorities. The children lived in two worlds: a Polish world which embraced the home and community activities and an English world which consisted of school, shopping and, for some, playmates.

I spoke Polish at home. I never ever spoke English there.... With any Polish friends I had outside of my home I would speak English. It was like two different worlds — an English world and a Polish world. I walked into the house and I became Polish.<sup>37</sup>

The dual life of the second-generation migrant involves an almost schizophrenic existence. Youngsters of almost all ethnic minority backgrounds have to mediate between the cultural values of home and ethnic community on the one hand, and those of the host society. If they are lucky the gulf in customs and expectations between the two will not be great. The linguistic divide is perhaps the most obvious hurdle to be overcome, but there are others, often very subtle: nuances of meaning, of gesture, of humour, which the children absorb in their new surroundings.

There are patterns of formal interaction in social encounters among Poles which are regarded as extravagant or outlandish by the British. Kissing the hand of a female upon meeting is one example of a situation where misunderstanding could arise. Certainly for the younger generation of Polish males who were brought up to observe such a practice there was a need to reassess each social situation according to expectations and norms of the group. They became aware that there was no need to follow this practice within a British social environment —

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<sup>36</sup> Tape B/7/KD.

<sup>37</sup> Tape B/18/TR.

but but it was not clear how to proceed in a mixed setting — that is, where parents' Polish friends were present with English wives?<sup>38</sup> Less obvious cases of cultural difference include the levels of formality: the repetitive handshaking with male friends and acquaintances in a Polish context and a perhaps more conservative dress code (the older generation and many younger Poles still wear suits to church), where the British have become increasingly casual. Such situations, if not read correctly, could result in conflict and embarrassment.

At a later stage in their school careers, many youngsters experienced the 'loss of freedom' that came from commitment to weekend activities such as Polish school. Chief sufferers were those selected to represent their British schools in football or rugby matches. In some families, the conflict in activities led to harsh words, arguments about the relevance of Polish school and even youthful rebellion. (In one family, a compromise was arrived at whereby the son played football and went to Polish school on alternate weekends — hardly a desirable solution one would have thought for either team manager or teacher!)

Some young people found the behavioural code and expectations of this 'urban village' too narrow and restrictive and they rebelled. 'Bogusia' broke with her local community even before she left home to study nursing. She left at the age of sixteen or seventeen years old to start going to 'discos' — which upset her parents, who would have liked her to stay within the Polish community:

Out there they couldn't control me. Within the Polish community it was a controlled environment. So I think a lot of people pushed for their children to remain within that control — like the Asians, who are getting concerned now.<sup>39</sup>

'Jacek' (Leicester) explained that he had been in the community folk-dance group and in the scouts, as well as attending Saturday school. He had been more or less forced by his parents into joining the dance group and had left as soon as he could. Others expressed resentment at the loss of free time, but stressed the firmness of parental rule in those far-off days. A number admitted, some with enthusiasm, that with hindsight the sacrifice had been worthwhile, and that they had been enriched by being exposed to Polish cultural activities.

A minority of those interviewed had had limited contact with Polish community activities such as the Saturday school in their early years. This group includes individuals who should be considered as 'committed' to Polish values in the sense that they either (a) play a prominent part in community organizational life, and/or (b) are bringing their children up in a decidedly Polish spirit. Some were sent to English boarding schools, but others who avoided a 'stereotypical' Polish upbringing include those of mixed parentage (Polish-British,

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38 Tape B/26/AR.

39 Tape B/22/BT.



Polish–Italian) or those who were brought up in households which were distant from centres of Polish life.

*Crossing Ethnic Boundaries: Discrimination, Stigma and Self-Esteem*

To the Poles who arrived in Britain in the 1940s — and to their children — discrimination was not uncommon; indeed, it was something that many of those who went into factory work were forced to accept as part of the social environment. References to the ‘xenophobia’ of the British abound in Polish accounts of these years and examples of institutional discrimination from government agencies are reported well into the 1960s.<sup>40</sup>

Inevitably, for many children growing up within the camps or within an urban Polish community early contacts with British society and culture, as we have seen, were limited. Few had televisions in the household at that time although a number of families had radios. For many youngsters, their first remembered friends were the children of Polish neighbours. Their first real contact with British children was at school. Leaving home and going to school for the first time is a trying experience for most children but for many Polish children, who had at best a smattering of the language, it was often traumatic:

I think my first memory is of going to school and not being able to speak a word of English.... I cried my eyes out, because I couldn't understand anything and I couldn't make myself understood. And it took some time, playing with the local children in the area where we were living before I learned enough English to get by.<sup>41</sup>

Another respondent recalls being sent to a Gloucestershire convent where her aunt was a nun. She did not speak any English at the outset and remembers the anguish of the first few weeks, not being able to understand the ‘gibberish’ that people were talking.<sup>42</sup> ‘G.W.’ too could not speak a word of English when she went to her first school, a Catholic school run by nuns. She recalls being very frightened and

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40 Institutionalized discrimination existed in the 1940s and persisted until the late 1960s. See the case of J. Kowalewski, a former soldier of the Polish Second Corps (and therefore, as he pointed out, of the Eighth Army) who was refused a job in the Post Office in the 1940s, *O Żołnierzu Ciułaczu*, London, 1955, p. 87. A more recent case was that of Michael Szuba (son of a Polish father and an English mother) who was refused entry to the Royal Air Force College, Cranwell because of his Polish family connections. This attracted a great deal of public and media criticism. See, for example, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Yorkshire Post* of 28 September 1968. Also local press such as the *Grimsby Evening Telegraph*.

41 Tape B/17JP.

42 Tape B/7/KD.

during prayers at the end of the school day she would improvise the responses, simply in order to be able to move her lips.<sup>43</sup>

At the time (1950s) there was not the structure of support within the state educational system for pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds that has developed since. There were no remedial language teachers, for example, and newcomers from other cultural milieux were simply expected to 'fit in'. As one young woman said, it was a case of sink or swim.

Another respondent was asked if her first experience of English school in west London was a shock:

I think it was more of a shock for my mother because she didn't know what to expect for me. The family joke is that she felt I ought to go armed with one word, which would get me through the first day. And that word was 'toilet'. Apparently I came back really very angry with her because that was not the word.... The expression used was 'Please may I be excused?' But of course there was no way of her knowing that, so she learnt with us.<sup>44</sup>

A further case highlights the tragedy of the 'speechless', showing how the lack of communicative skills led to misunderstanding and injustice. In his first year at a Scottish primary school 'Wiesława's' young brother was found to be in possession of half a crown. The Poles from the Macmerry camp outside Edinburgh were regarded as 'poor' by the local working-class Scots and it was inconceivable to teachers that he should have come by the money honestly. The young boy did not speak sufficient English to be able to explain that his mother had given it to him. His silence was taken as an admission of guilt, and he was soundly beaten.<sup>45</sup>

Other examples were cited of teachers making life difficult for Polish youngsters.<sup>46</sup> Several respondents who went to Catholic schools mentioned that tension was caused when they came across teachers from Irish backgrounds. 'Teresa S.' recalled that at her London convent school she had received good marks and was in the top five in her class. But at the end of the term, when small prizes were being given out to the children, it tended to be the girls with Irish names who were called out. Her father went in to the school to discuss the matter with the Mother Superior. He was told in confidence that there were many sisters who were jealous of the Polish children because they tended to do much

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<sup>43</sup> Tape B/23/GW.

<sup>44</sup> Tape B/35/TC.

<sup>45</sup> Notes from interview with Mrs 'Wiesława' L. (Edinburgh), 21 July 1993.

<sup>46</sup> 'Gosia' W. related an incident that had happened to her as a 15-year old when was at school. She and her friends were caught walking in town not wearing school coats. She was singled out from the group and subjected to a 'racist tirade' from the teacher. One of the themes of the diatribe was that she should be 'grateful for what this country has given you...'. Tape B/23/GW.



better in educational terms than their Irish contemporaries — ‘And your daughter is a good example.’<sup>47</sup>

For some of the children there was security in numbers. In the 1950s and 1960s Polish communities were not only more compact in a residential sense, but more children were being born within the community. Since parents frequently directed their children to attend Catholic schools, there would often be several Polish children in the same year, and even in the same class. Several informants recall, from the 1960s, large contingents of Polish children in their classes — in one case, a Catholic grammar school in Leicester, it was said to be between twelve and fifteen with a Polish music teacher to boot.<sup>48</sup>

The process of cultural adaptation was easier for younger children within the family, since they could benefit from their older siblings’ linguistic facility and experience of English school. ‘Staszek B.’ recalls being invited to a junior class at school to help translate for his little cousin who had just arrived for his first day. Another respondent observed:

I am six years younger than my elder sister and she went to school knowing only the very basics of English — ‘Please’, ‘Thank-you’ and ‘Can I go to the toilet?’ But because she had brought some of the English back into the household, I grew up knowing more English.<sup>49</sup>

Where there were larger families, the third, fourth, or perhaps even fifth child would find the transition to school correspondingly less of a culture shock. But in such families too one finds that it is the younger children whose Polish is correspondingly weaker than their older siblings.

The language problem — mastering English — was an important hurdle to be overcome, but it was a problem of limited duration. Despite the initial shock, most children were able to converse in English within a matter of months. Other more overt and lasting aspects of their Polish background were to cause hilarity for their English peers, and embarrassment for themselves — their ‘unpronounceable’ Polish names. Repeatedly, respondents referred to the uneasiness they experienced at the start of the school year when new teachers would attempt to learn their names. Similarly when the register was being read at the beginning of the day:

It was always embarrassing. At least I felt that. My name, beginning with ‘B’, came at the beginning of the register and I would raise my hand in anticipation to try to avoid problems over pronunciation.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Tape B/19/TS.

<sup>48</sup> Tape B/1HA; Tape B/5/SB; Tape B/35/TC.

<sup>49</sup> Tape B/5/SB.

<sup>50</sup> Tape B/6/BB.

Another informant recalled being teased by other children over her surname. 'Urbańczyk' became 'urban chick'. The spelling was difficult even for the teachers and she often found herself having to write down her name in capitals for teachers and other people she encountered: The 'czyk' ending especially threw people and I would get comments like, 'Are you doing all the alphabet then?'<sup>51</sup> A schoolteacher (from Manchester) confessed that he

... received a lot of stick as a child ... at Junior School, because I was there with an unpronounceable name. I was ridiculed and that used to hurt me.... In one class there were four of us [Polish children] but the names of the others weren't so bad. But my parents used to say, 'Remember you are Polish ... remember you always have two languages, your parents are Polish'. And that was enough to see me through.<sup>52</sup>

The support the child received from a warm and stable home background was crucial at such times.<sup>53</sup> Although early experiences were sometimes hurtful, some of the children were able to develop psychological defence mechanisms - a sense of their own superiority - to cope with such pressures. One young woman claimed that although she had not had a hard time at school, she always remained something of an outsider; she felt that little bit different, 'better in a way, because I knew another language'.<sup>54</sup> Another woman, mother of three teenage daughters, recalls that she was teased more because she had been born in Africa than because of anything to do with her Polish background. She was also struck by how insular and 'unknowledgeable' the British were.<sup>55</sup>

A respondent in his forties from Coventry was more philosophical about his school experiences:

Of course, when you're a child and because your name was odd, you would get the ribaldry and the name twisted around, and the name-calling. But that's all part of growing up. It never really bothered me. So the scrapes you got into as a result ... I would just call 'character-forming'!<sup>56</sup>

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51 Tape B/7/KD.

52 Tape B/18/TR.

53 In such enclosed émigré families the first journey of the child to school is often a shock considerably greater than that for an English child. Then the home appears to him the only safe and comforting place. B. Sulik, 'Przemiany społeczno-kulturalne wśród młodego pokolenie Polonii brytyjskiej a zagadnienia więzi z krajem', in H. Kubiak (ed.), *Forum Polonijne 1974*, Kraków, 1976, p. 136.

54 Tape B/1/HA.

55 Tape B/23/GW.

56 Tape B/16/BK. Interestingly this same respondent referred to continuing problems of this kind in adult life — into the 1980s. Now, with a much more cosmopolitan society — and a much more cosmopolitan business sphere — it was essential to latch on quickly to foreign names and get your tongue around them, otherwise it could mean losing business.



Not all Polish children found their schooldays in Britain an ordeal. Many, perhaps the majority, would claim that apart from the early language problems they had 'normal' school experiences. One young man encountered in Leicester seemed baffled by my questions, insisting that he did not remember any bullying or discrimination. Indeed, the teachers had seemed interested when they discovered that he had a Polish background. His overall judgement was: 'I didn't feel English and I didn't feel Polish. I just felt at school.'<sup>57</sup> With time and an increasing level of immigration to postwar Britain there grew a greater acceptance of outsiders, so that the younger children encountered a more tolerant, more welcoming atmosphere than those who went to British schools in the late 1940s and 1950s.

But pressures of this kind in childhood remained as painful memories with some second-generation Poles. As one of those interviewed said, 'You don't like to stick out too much from the crowd — as kids anyway.' Continuing problems with names in adult life led to many changing — or anglicizing — their names in an attempt to 'pass' within the British community. Hence Czeszniewski became Chesney, Majerkiewicz became Myers, Starzewski became Starr, Kozorys became Korris and so on. Indeed not infrequently obituary notices in the *Polish Daily* carry two forms of the name of the deceased: the original Polish form and the adopted English version. Others changed completely, taking a name at random — for example from the street in which they lived. One case was referred to me in which a young man had changed to using his mother's maiden name because it was more pronounceable than his father's. The changing or anglicization of names is generally frowned upon within the community as a mark of disloyalty, a rejection of one's roots and heritage: as a symbolic abandonment of all that is Polish. It is the kind of issue that can cause breaches within families. But not everybody interviewed was prepared to condemn such a step out of hand: 'I can understand it if there is difficulty pronouncing the name.... But the people who have changed because they didn't want to be thought of as Polish — that's wrong.'<sup>58</sup>

Some informants showed awareness of the barriers their parents had to surmount in the 1940s and 1950s. 'Mietek C.' (Luton) recalls that as a boy he went to an egg-packing station near Marsworth to translate for his mother who was seeking a job. They were told quite openly, in a way which today would contravene equal opportunity legislation, 'We don't employ foreigners.' At a later stage (c. 1960) his father had been unable to obtain a mortgage from the building society, again the suspicion being that it was because of his Polish background.<sup>59</sup> Such

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<sup>57</sup> Tape B/1/HA.

<sup>58</sup> Tape B/22/BT. One observer of the Polish community scene remarked that some younger Poles are now, in a burst of ethnic pride and self-assertion, changing back to the names that they, or their parents, abandoned years ago.

<sup>59</sup> Notes from interview with Mietek C. (Luton), 16 September 1993.

early feelings of rejection in childhood leave indelible impressions and it is hardly surprising that in adulthood the individuals concerned still harbour a sense of unease, of not 'fitting' in, in a society to which they are in all outward respects perfectly well adapted.

'Kazik N.', a college lecturer living in Surrey, was asked to account for his feeling of 'not quite belonging' in English society. He replied:

If I were to lie on a psychiatrist's couch, I think I might trace it back to early childhood and going to a shop in Finchley Road when I was three or four years old. I remember getting some very unpleasant vibes from the shopkeeper. We had just gone in for some ice-cream. My mother couldn't then speak English ... could just about get by. And there was a very, very unpleasant shop-assistant who obviously ... was wondering what were all these foreigners doing coming over here. That's the earliest incident I remember and it made a huge impression on me. And I wonder if it hasn't sort of 'stayed' with me. It must have left scars. I remember the incident very clearly....<sup>60</sup>

Another respondent, a structural engineer from the Midlands (quoted earlier in this section discussing the ragging he received from English schoolmates as 'character-forming'), stated rather fatefully as the interview closed, 'Maybe we were only meant to be here for a period — like Moses was forty years in the wilderness; perhaps we were just here to learn ... the good things about British society.'<sup>61</sup>

Prejudice and discrimination occurs at the margins of group life, at the boundary or interface between groups. For the older generation of Poles in the early years it could be experienced in the workplace, in the housing market and in social situations. The younger generation encountered prejudice and discrimination at school (in some cases by virtue of the fact that they had drawn attention to themselves through their academic success). The ethnic community was a haven from such early hostility.

In many respects prejudice is a natural human reaction to the threat of the 'outsider'. Anthony Richmond once observed that antipathy towards out-groups performs a positively integrative function for individual personalities and for the social systems in which they participate. It bolsters up the individual's self-esteem, and promotes in-group solidarity. But Richmond also observed that in the 1950s a 'mild antipathy' towards ethnic minorities was the institutionalized social norm in Britain. Studies of national character, he went on, suggested that early socialization processes gave rise to aggression which was repressed and projected on to strangers. This made shyness and an unconscious fear of strangers a typically English personality trait.<sup>62</sup>

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60 Tape B/28/KN.

61 Notes from interview with Bogdan K. (Coventry), 26 January 1993.

62 A. Richmond, 'Theoretical Orientations in Studies of Ethnic Group Relations in Britain', *MAN*, August 1957, pp. 121–2.



The Polish emigracja, as with so many embattled minorities, struck back in its own way. It was concerned to maintain cultural cohesion and ideological purpose, so mechanisms of defence and exclusion developed, both on a personal and on an institutional level, within the ethnic community. The existence of separate institutions such as the Polish parishes, scouting movement, clubs and so on — membership of which is based on language and ethnic background — is an example of this. Polish Clubs run by the Ex-Combatants do not in the 1990s *exclude* non-Polish members but they do have two types of membership which ensure that control cannot pass out of Polish hands. On a personal level the reported reluctance of many Poles to see their sons and daughters marrying British (certainly non-Catholic) partners may be seen as a form of reverse discrimination.

In conclusion it should be stated that for the majority of second-generation Poles interviewed, discrimination had not been a serious issue. Even those who mentioned problems in childhood certainly believed that their own children were well integrated in British life.

### *Education and Social Mobility*

It was almost axiomatic among those interviewed in the course of this research that émigré Poles had placed great emphasis upon the educational achievement of their children brought up in Britain in the immediate postwar decades. There was often considerable parental and community pressure to perform well within the British school system, even though the Polish children were in many cases starting school with no English, and had little reinforcement (in terms of British cultural background) from home. On the other hand, many parents were ambitious for their children and solicitous that they would benefit from the opportunities which were open to them. Also there was a determination, born of national pride, which communicated itself to the children that they should not fare worse than their British classmates.

Is the drive for education a feature of all immigrant groups which seek to establish a foothold in their new country and suffer from a sense of inadequacy and loss of control over day-to-day events? There are other ethnic minorities in Britain — the Chinese and certain Asian groups, for example — in which educational achievement at school level is above the national average. By contrast, members of the postwar Italian community in Britain, based on settlers from rural areas of southern Italy, seem not to have viewed education as a means to advancement. Terri Colpi has written that no motivation for learning was given to the children and little encouragement was given for school work. Consequently in towns such as Bedford and Peterborough, few youngsters of Italian descent went on to tertiary education in the 1960s and 1970s:

In general terms ... since the first generation had migrated for entirely economic reasons, work and jobs rather than education were regarded as the best means of making progress, for child and family alike. Children were encouraged to leave school as soon as possible and in many cases it was the parents who found the school-leaver his or her first job.

A priority, continues the author, was to see their children into 'skilled' jobs. They were keen to see their offspring apprenticed to such trades as carpentry, plumbing, upholstery and especially motor mechanics. For girls, jobs in shops, offices and hairdressing salons were considered appropriate.<sup>63</sup>

The Polish group in the United States before the Second World War showed similar propensities. Victor Greene has written that priority was given to buying property, sending remittances back to families in Poland and church contributions. Consequently little money was available for educating the young (at a time, of course, when education had to be paid for):

It was the custom to have large families, and more children represented more wage-earners, but this was a function children could not perform if they attended school. As a result most Polish parents were reluctant to see their children through high school, much less college. A basic education up to the age of Confirmation was normally felt to be sufficient....<sup>64</sup>

For the Polish group arriving in Britain in the 1940s therefore the reasons for the emphasis upon education has to be sought in the social characteristics, the background experiences, and the resettlement conditions — and opportunities — which they found upon arrival in Britain.

For children being born and reaching school age in the decades following the 1944 Education Act these opportunities were considerable. The Act had required that poverty should not prevent any youngster from receiving a decent education. For the first time in Britain resources were made available to create school places for all children, an expansion of university education was planned, and university places were to be available on merit, those selected to be funded through local government grant allocations. A streaming system was introduced for the transition from primary to secondary level at

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<sup>63</sup> T. Colpi, *The Italian Factor. The Italian Community in Britain*, Edinburgh and London: Mainstream, 1991. p. 201. Castles and Miller point out that this is true also for North African immigrants in France: 'Immigrant children comprised a growing share of the school age population but were disproportionately likely to do poorly in school, to be early school leavers or to enter the labour force without the kinds of educational and vocational credentials increasingly required for gainful employment.' S. Castles and M.J. Miller, *The Age of Migration. International Population Movements in the Modern World*, London, 1993, p. 191.

<sup>64</sup> V. Greene, 'The Poles', in *The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, 1980, p. 798.



eleven years old. Children took the eleven-plus exam, on the basis of which it was decided whether the child would go through to a traditional academic grammar-school education, or would enter one of the 'modern' schools which were intended to provide youngsters with a more technical, vocationally oriented education. The system eventually came under attack and was dismantled in most areas of the country, since streaming children at such an early age, a process considered to weigh heavily on their subsequent careers, was felt by many to be unjust. It was a system though which was in force across the country during the period when most of the second-generation respondents to this project were being educated, although a number were in any case sent to private schools.<sup>65</sup> Girls especially were sent in large numbers to convent schools, either because the parents wished to ensure a Catholic education or because, the children having failed the eleven-plus exam, a Catholic school was considered preferable to the local 'secondary modern'. A male interviewee from the Ealing community expressed his feelings about Polish community attitudes to education in the following words:

I felt that there was a lot of pressure to succeed and do well. My feeling about the Polish community, as far as I picked it up, was that in general children from Polish families tended to do very well; it was certainly very well advertised when they did.<sup>66</sup>

A young mother in the West Midlands confirmed that in her family

Our parents were always keen for us to work hard and do well ... [although] ... we were not pressurized as much as some [Polish] children who were told quite simply, 'You must be the best.'<sup>67</sup>

A Leicester woman, mother of two, remembered the exhortations from her mother to do well ('You are Polish. You must succeed. You must show them that you are better than them.') and later, at secondary level, the reminder that 'You must show them that you are not of peasant stock.' She also recalled that during part of her school career there were three Polish girls in her class who occupied the first three places on the basis of examination results.<sup>68</sup> Again, a school-teacher in Manchester recalled,

Whenever we had guests, the first question that was asked was, '*Czy dobrze sie uczy?*' [Is he doing well at school?]. Always. That was very, very important.... My father used to say, '*Nie badz tak jak ja...*' [Don't be like

<sup>65</sup> A small number of those interviewed went to the Polish boarding schools for boys (at Fawley Court, Henley) or for girls (at Pitsford, Northamptonshire). Both schools closed in the 1980s.

<sup>66</sup> Tape B/33/MM.

<sup>67</sup> Tape B/11/TK.

<sup>68</sup> Tape B/22/BT.

me...]. After three years on the night-shift he used to come back looking haggard and dirty.<sup>69</sup>

Sitting in the Polish Club in Melton I asked one young man, who had grown up in the community, how many of his contemporaries had gone on to some form of tertiary education. He paused for thought. Could he not think of any others, I enquired? Quite the reverse, he said, he was trying to think of anybody who had not.<sup>70</sup> Another respondent, a mother in her forties living in Balham, estimated that some 80–90 per cent of her contemporaries had gone on to some form of higher education and then on to careers in computing, banking, business, etc.<sup>71</sup> As a general rule, technical subjects or the professions were preferred for boys, whereas girls were freer to choose subjects in the humanities or could go on to study nursing. There was probably also less pressure and less expectation for girls generally. There is some anecdotal evidence that the level of academic achievement, having reached a high point with the generation leaving school in the 1960s and 1970s, began to decline in succeeding decades. This is perhaps a natural reaction in a community which feels increasingly secure and affluent and for the members of which social advancement is consequently viewed in less desperate terms.

A young man in his early thirties from west London agreed that in most Polish families there was pressure to succeed in educational terms. University entrance had been, he suggested, the minimum acceptable level of achievement. As a result, unsurprisingly perhaps, he and his four siblings had all been to university. Unusually, in this particular family the father too had received a university education in Poland before the war. In Britain he had initially been ‘declassified’ through being unable to find a job in his specialist field, but as a self-made businessman had more than compensated in terms of acquired wealth and standard of living.<sup>72</sup>

It would be a mistake though to believe that all ‘academic achievers’ in the Polish community are the children of former professionals, ‘declassified’ as a result of their enforced exile. It is true that many of the parents of those interviewed were formerly lawyers, career army officers or civil servants. By projecting their ambitions onto their children it is easy to see that in some cases they were compensating for the careers they themselves had lost. But other parents were from peasant backgrounds and had received only rudimentary education in pre-war Poland. The wartime years of migration and military training, followed by the transition to jobs in British industry had widened their perspectives, opening their eyes to opportunities that most could not

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69 Tape B/18/TR.

70 Notes from conversation with A.W. (Melton.Mowbray), 18 Sept. 1993.

71 Notes from conversation with I.G. (Balham), 2 March 1993.

72 Tape B/26/AR.



have dreamed of before the war. Families in which the parents came from rural, essentially peasant backgrounds in pre-war Poland but their children had received higher education are not isolated examples. In such cases, it seems that the mind-broadening experiences of the 1940s, the opportunities that British society offered, and the values and discipline of the ethnic community and parents were crucial. It is possible too that there was a certain tendency to follow the example set by more educated community 'leaders'.

The reasons for such aspirations are varied. For some, motivations can be traced directly to the experience of forced uprooting — the loss not only of social position, but also of worldly wealth. Several respondents recalled their parents' justification for placing such a heavy emphasis upon education. Recalling that they themselves, or in some cases the grandparents, had lost all in terms of worldly goods owing to deportation by the Soviets or the Germans, they would tap their foreheads and indicate that what you held in your memory — knowledge, intelligence, skills, know-how — would last: it could never be taken away from one.<sup>73</sup>

Of course, despite the pressure to do well, not all Polish children managed to reach the dizzy heights of Oxbridge, or fulfil all their parents' expectations and hopes. An informant in Luton told me that there, Polish youngsters had not all done well in terms of educational qualifications, but most 'had made their way'.<sup>74</sup> In Coventry too, I was told that not all the youngsters within the community had done well; some had, but others had just 'copped out'.<sup>75</sup> It seems that the level of academic achievement may have been lower in the more working-class communities of the Midlands and North — where (a) there were more non-military Poles settling, including large numbers of EVWs recruited from the DP camps in Germany, and (b) the expectations of British neighbours and schoolfriends were lower. There was also, within some families I encountered, a striking diversity between the educational attainment of individual members. Sometimes there was an explanation for this. For the eldest son or daughter there had been sufficient money to afford private education, but with subsequent children it had been necessary to fall back on the state system. Where the individual concerned had not passed the eleven-plus and had 'fallen in with a bad crowd' at the secondary modern, the level of achievement — and hence

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<sup>73</sup> One of my informants indicated that her grandfather's family had been landowners, but the family's portable possessions and livestock had been requisitioned by the Russians during the first world war. As the Russians led the cattle and other livestock away, the grandfather said to his son (informant's father), 'Remember, the one thing they can't take away from you is your education.' This, she indicated, had remained a guiding light for her father who had later seen his career chances blighted — by war and emigration. Tape B/15/BM.

<sup>74</sup> Notes from interview with M. and E.C. (Luton–Dunstable), 16 September 1993.

<sup>75</sup> Tape B/14/BK.

career options — would be less than those of older siblings. Some children failed the exam not because the will or the push from home was lacking, but simply because they lacked whatever was necessary to get through. A Manchester teacher explained:

Manchester then had the eleven-plus. It was a measure of the success of a Polish family ... if your son or daughter passed and went to grammar school. A lot of parents sent their children to private tutors just so that they would pass the eleven-plus and go to a grammar school — and I failed. I failed the eleven-plus and I think it was one of the greatest tragedies my mother endured in this country that her son had failed and had to go to a 'secondary' as she called it.<sup>76</sup>

Failure was sorely felt not least because, in the village atmosphere of the Polish community, it was so public, there was no way it could be hidden. Within days of the results being released the news would have spread around the community and parents of the unfortunate offspring would have to face the sympathy of friends and neighbours when attending mass and other public events. Another informant whose views on this issue were strong was a woman in her early forties, brought up in one of the Midlands communities. Her account of her upbringing and attitudes towards education within the household are worth quoting *in extenso*, especially since this passage follows an account of how good her Polish had been as a child and how she came to 'star' in the *akademie* organized within the community:

There are things [about my Polish background] that have shattered me ... like education, for instance: 'Unless you're educated, you're nothing.' And ... I failed the eleven-plus. My grandmother didn't talk to me for two years! I was eleven! You know, because I'd brought shame on the family. I was very conscious that suddenly I was no longer this wonderful person. I'd failed the eleven-plus whereas my contemporaries had passed.

Why, I asked, had it happened?

Well, my English just wasn't up to scratch. And I can still remember how frightened I was, how petrified that I had to pass this exam.<sup>77</sup>

The pressures to which many older members of the second generation were subjected brought a considerable measure of achievement and success, but also for some a degree of pain and resentment. There were, one might say, 'casualties'. It is easy to forget that these children, born in the resettlement camps in the 1940s and 1950s, were often being reared with two burdens of expectation weighing on them. The first was that they would succeed — indeed

<sup>76</sup> Tape B/18/TR.

<sup>77</sup> Tape B/15/BM. This interview continued with a further critical account of the pressures experienced from the informant's family and the Polish community in general. In particular she queried the whole structure of values that assesses people and ranks them according to educational achievement.



excel — in terms of the British educational system. The second was that they would cultivate and cherish their cultural heritage, maintaining a knowledge of written and spoken Polish, and their distant homeland's history, geography and culture. Having experienced such pressures as children, how do these people as adults now regard the upbringing and education of their own children? In some one detects something of a 'backlash'. Feeling more confident than their parents in a society which they have known from birth, and without the uncertainties and insecurities which the outsider feels, there is less of a need to 'compensate' through driving their own children to feats of educational achievement. A number expressed determination that their own children would not face similar pressures. One mother in the Midlands emphasized that her attitudes were more relaxed:

I would never push my children. Because I was always told, 'You've got to do this. You've got to be better.' And it was always echoing in the back of my mind, 'I've got to do this for my parents.' Now I tell *my* children, 'You do it for yourselves. It's your life. If you want to do it, you do it.'<sup>78</sup>

Others, being achievers themselves and appreciating the value of hard work and a good education, seem determined to project their own children along the self-same path — where possible through private education — but in a more confident and less strident manner, aware that their own children carry far more cultural advantages from the home than they did.

There have been several notable consequences of this drive for education and academic achievement on the part of the Polish exile community of the 1940s. In the first place the youngsters leave the local communities in which they have been reared. This migration process starts at an early stage — often at the age of eighteen when young people leave school and go to college or university. It is at that juncture that their involvement with Polish community activities is interrupted and often ceases for good. Most of the respondents in the survey — those that had been students — confessed that this was a period during which they involved themselves in college or university life. A further consequence is that with education have come better jobs. With only some two or three exceptions, all of the younger generation of Poles encountered in the course of research had higher status jobs than their parents. Most have white-collar jobs in the professions, in business and in industry. Some have their own businesses or consultancies. Certainly there has been a considerable degree of inter-generational social mobility in the families I encountered.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Tape B/7/KD.

<sup>79</sup> A study of occupational shift across generations in the Polish community in Slough in the late 1970s revealed a move from predominantly blue-collar manual occupations among the older generation of Poles to white-collar jobs with local firms or in the professions, or else their own businesses and consultancies, for

Milton Gordon made the point many years ago, in writing about the situation of American ethnic groups, that the most intelligent and able of minority group members are often lost to the sub-communities and creamed off into a kind of intellectual melting-pot. Often, writes Gordon, the intellectuals find social life within the minority group too stifling and the opportunities too limited.<sup>80</sup> George Devos has made a similar point, observing that when the individual from within the ethnic community has acquired competence in a skill or profession, his primary commitment shifts to his occupation, or even more broadly to an assigned class status in society: 'In most societies where social mobility is possible, ethnic minorities continually lose membership to the politically, economically and prestige dominant segment.'<sup>81</sup>

The widened intellectual and cultural horizons which many younger generation Poles have developed have combined to render Polish community life narrow and restrictive in comparison with the multifarious opportunities available in mainstream British society. For many, the Polish community does not present a social milieu which they find stimulating, or in which their needs and interests can be fulfilled. This is very much truer of the smaller provincial communities (and even some of the larger provincial communities) where the professional Pole of the second generation will often find too few like-minded people to feel comfortable:

... the very people who become the doctors and the lawyers etc. leave the community. As soon as they grow up and reach eighteen or nineteen years old it's 'Good-bye'. Because the Polish community then has nothing for them. As it would be if you were English and your mother lived in a council house and you became a surgeon ultimately. Your life is somewhere else isn't it?... You wouldn't keep coming back to that estate for your social life because it's got nothing for you; you've gone beyond that.<sup>82</sup>

Berger and Luckman explained the effects of social mobility on personal identity in more sociological terms:

The norms and values on which the individual has been brought up are no longer reaffirmed in the present relevant social relationships. They are no longer backed up by the authority of the old primary groups. Thus they become less and less 'real' to the individual — as does his past identity itself.<sup>83</sup>

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younger generation Poles. K.R. Sword, 'Ethnic Identity and Association among British Émigrés in a Polish Town', DPhil thesis, University of Sussex, 1983, pp. 77–8.

80 M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, New York, 1964, pp. 224ff.

81 G. Devos, 'Social Stratification and Ethnic Pluralism', pp. 443, 450.

82 Tape B/23/GW.

83 T. Luckmann and P. Berger, 'Social Mobility and Personal Identity', *European Journal of Sociology*, vol. 5, 1964, no. 2, p. 337.



But such 'evaporation', as George Devos terms the 'brain drain' from the ethnic community, is not irreversible.<sup>84</sup> And certainly for some, as Gordon points out, being a 'big fish' in a small pond can also have its attractions.<sup>85</sup> With social mobility though has come geographical mobility, as many of the second generation have been drawn away from the communities in which they grew up. Increasing labour mobility has been a feature of British life in the second half of the twentieth century. While pleasing to economists and government planners, it does little to foster the traditional ties of community. In the Polish minority too many of the communities have suffered from a 'brain drain' as their brightest elements (leadership potential) have left the area to find jobs elsewhere. This is especially true of the North, and to a certain extent also of the Midlands and West. The chief beneficiary has been the South and South-East, with Greater London a main draw. But migration has occurred over much greater distances. Respondents spoke of their former Saturday school classmates having dispersed to South Africa, Australia, Canada and the US. One respondent from the Leicester community pointed out to me that after a quarter of a century her Polish contemporaries included girls who were living in Edinburgh, South Africa, Australia and Paris. She continued,

A lot did move away, but the ones who didn't move away — to be honest — were the ones who didn't go on to higher education.... They left school and then got married to an English boy and stayed, perhaps in Loughborough or in Leicester....<sup>86</sup>

Hence the very values that the older generation of Poles imposed on their children — the drive for educational achievement and a 'good' job — have contributed (inadvertently) to the erosion of the community. This is particularly true in those areas of the country with declining local economies, where there are not the jobs to retain intelligent and qualified young people in the area. As individuals have moved away their links with the communities of origin have been weakened. The record of educational achievement and social mobility in the Polish community rules out an analysis based on class, or structural barriers to advancement. It also indicates that criticisms which have been levelled recently at the 'deprivationist fallacy' of the 'race relations industry' in Britain may be justified.<sup>87</sup> The assumption that ethnicity and race are synonymous with disadvantage and that this disadvantage needs to be remedied by 'affirmative action' policies on the part of government has

84 G. Devos, 'Social Stratification and Ethnic Pluralism', pp. 52–3

85 M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life*, pp. 244ff.

86 Tape B/23/GW.

87 See E. Cashmore, 'Flying Business Class: Britain's New Ethnic Elite', *New Community*, 17(3), April 1991, pp. 347–58; also R. Ballard, 'New Clothes for the Emperor? The Conceptual Nakedness of Britain's Race Relations Industry' *New Community*, vol. 18, no. 3, April 1993, pp. 481–92.

been rendered increasingly untenable by the evidence. Successful businessmen from the ethnic communities are among the ranks of the new rich. The Poles, like the Jews before them, have integrated and prospered not because of the help they received from government agencies, but because of the values and aspirations they fostered both for their own future and that of their children.

### *The Homeland in Myth and Reality*

The poet Czesław Miłosz, attempting from his Californian exile to capture the essence of adjustment following the dislocation of the migratory experience, once wrote:

Total uprootedness is contrary to our nature, and the human plant once plucked from the ground tries to send its roots into the ground on to which it is thrown.... This is so because we are physical beings; the place we occupy, bounded by the surface of our skin, must be located in space, not in a 'nowhere'.... In exiles from the eastern part of Europe one often notices a desperate refusal to accept that fact.... They try to preserve their homeland as an ideal space....<sup>88</sup>

This sense of the lost homeland as a store of reminiscences, frequently from childhood, from which memory filters out the painful and the negative, is a common feature of exile imagination. Like the emigrant Irish, the Poles yearned for a homeland to which (most of them were secretly aware) they would never return. They had changed irreversibly and so had the homeland. Nostalgia was all the sweeter for being unfulfilled. They encouraged in their children the same image of a lost homeland that they themselves harboured. So their children sang plaintively of the beauty of 'Polish flowers' at the *akademie*, or the young cub scouts promised in patriotic fervour to 'dive to the bottom of the sea' for Poland.

Parents and teachers, in conjuring up an image of Poland, had harked back to the pre-war years of their childhood. They compared Britain unfavourably — its lack of folk traditions, degraded sense of community, more formal personal relationships and increasingly dislocated family life — with the life in the homeland as they remembered it. Yet the reality of Polish life under communist rule — or even in the period following communist rule — was very different from the picture they transmitted. In questioning second-generation Poles about their childhood and upbringing in two cultures, one area of enquiry was directed towards determining whether the respondent had visited Poland. If so, what effect had the visit had upon a young person brought up within the minority community on a diet of Poland's

<sup>88</sup> C. Miłosz, 'Biblical Heirs and Modern Evils' in T. Wheeler (ed.), *The Immigrant Experience. The Anguish of Becoming American*, New York, 1971, p. 193.



history, folklore and culture? The reactions were extreme — from the uncritically positive to the gloomily negative. Many interviewees confessed to experiencing an emotional charge the moment they crossed the Polish frontier for the first time. Respondents recalled their reaction to the sight of road and street signs, shop displays in Polish, or hearing Polish spoken on the street wherever they went. ‘Kazik’ (from south-west London) confessed that on seeing the Polish white and red flag at the border crossing ‘you just fall apart emotionally’.<sup>89</sup> ‘Tadek’ (Manchester), visiting Poland for a second time with his parents, having qualified as a teacher, recalled vividly how at the frontier, his father stopped the car, got out and bent down to pick up the ‘holy’ soil.<sup>90</sup> ‘Ela’ (Ealing) mentioned three main shocks that met her on her first visit. The first ‘tremendous shock’ occurred because she had been brought up on images of pre-war Poland, ‘and this was not the Poland my parents had described to me’. The second shock occurred because she had been brought up with the idea that all Poles were anti-establishment (i.e. anti-communist) and therefore by extension solidly Catholic. So it astonished her to discover (‘because I was very religious at that age’) that her cousins did not believe in God. She continued,

The next shock was that everybody spoke Polish! I know it sounds stupid but here, if you were walking along in the street and you heard Polish spoken, you would immediately turn round to see who it was. So for the first few days in Poland I couldn’t stop turning round.<sup>91</sup>

This sense of emerging from a linguistic and cultural ‘ghetto’ — a circumscribed minority existence — into the full daylight of national existence was frequently described. Going to Poland as young adults many had it brought home to them for the first time that Polishness did not merely consist of Saturday school, Scouts and Sunday mass, but that there was a whole nation and culture for them to explore!

Two common reasons were mentioned for travelling to Poland. The first was as a member of a larger tourist group. Some of the respondents travelled over as teenagers in group tours organized by the Church. The ‘Montserrat’ tours draw young people of Polish background from all over Britain and provide a holiday of several weeks which includes religious instruction, tourism, history and time to visit relatives. For many, especially those from the smaller communities, the chance to be with other young people of similar background to themselves is in itself a major experience. It forges friendships which often outlast the holiday.

The second reason was to accompany parents on a trip to visit family in Poland. ‘Bogus’ (Manchester) recalled his first visit in 1961

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89 Tape B/28/KN.

90 Tape B/18/TR.

91 Tape B/27/EB.

accompanied by his mother and sister. It was the summer the Berlin Wall was erected and the situation at the frontier was, as he remembers, very tense, with ‘guns everywhere’. He continued,

I felt when I got there very English. You know, it was ‘*Anglik przyjechał....*’ [The Englishman has arrived.] But I could communicate in Polish. In fact those four weeks improved my language skills tremendously.<sup>92</sup>

Two elements are mentioned here which recur in other accounts. The first, quite naturally, is that language skills improved during their visit. (Though some make rather more of their astonishment and disappointment that the language skills they had were so inadequate, that colloquial Polish was so different to the language they had become used to at home.) The second is the irritation, particularly on the part of more committedly ‘patriotic’ individuals — of being referred to as ‘English’ by Polish relatives and friends.

‘Daniela’ (Melton) had initially visited Poland with her mother. This first visit had been an emotional experience, since her father had just died. Yet she was meeting his brothers and other family members for the first time. Poland itself, though, she remembered as ‘depressing’.<sup>93</sup> ‘Henryk’ (Leicester) had been to Poland twice before he left school, the first time being when he was twelve years old. He had enjoyed life with his relatives on the farm but, as he put it, ‘hated “Warszawa”’.<sup>94</sup> ‘W.’ (Melton) went to Poland largely through his own efforts, not because his parents sent him. He won a Polish Government scholarship to spend a year in Poland. But a major motivation, as he confessed, was the absence in Britain of any close relatives. He envied other children their grandparents, aunts, cousins and so on. His were all in Poland, and he wanted to make the most of the opportunity to meet them.<sup>95</sup>

Reactions to the reunions with relatives was interestingly varied. When ‘Basia’ (Coventry) first visited as a fourteen year old, there was for her no sense of ‘going home’, no profound emotional experience. There was just a sense of meeting new people with whom one might become close in the future. Later she did become close to her cousin, Wanda, with whom she travelled around Poland.<sup>96</sup> ‘Halina’ (Edinburgh) commented too that she had visited Poland and had met her family over there, but could not say that it had been a deep emotional experience. They were of the same blood — she was conscious of that — but family in name only. They were, she said, not close — ‘nothing to do with

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92 Tape B/6/BB.

93 Notes from interview with D.L. (Melton), 17 September 1993.

94 Tape B/1/HA.

95 Tape B/10/WJ.

96 Tape B/15/BM.



you'. And indeed it was difficult to see how they could be, since you needed proximity over a period of time for 'bonding' to take place.<sup>97</sup>

Linked to the mixed emotions of first meetings with relatives were the reactions to the material conditions in which the relatives lived. Most youngsters seem to have been acutely aware that the standard of living of relatives in Poland was much inferior to that which they themselves enjoyed in Britain. Many relatives lived in rural areas, and whereas young people from London, Manchester or Leicester may have enjoyed the encounters with farm animals they also at times missed an accustomed level of comfort: poor toilet facilities and inadequate plumbing were mentioned, the bad roads (potholed) and, according to precisely when the visit was made, an absence of goods in the shops. 'Kasia' (Leicester) made her first visit in 1968, when her whole family travelled to visit relatives. She remembers the poverty, especially of her father's relatives, and recalls how the Polish kinfolk reacted to the fact that they arrived in a car ('We were millionaires ten times over in their eyes.'). As a result of the poverty she witnessed, she did not want to return to Poland for some time, but insisted that this had not prevented her from being proud of her Polish roots.<sup>98</sup>

Emotional reactions and the sense of belonging or foreignness are an important part of this experience. Adjusting one's assumed identity to the realities of the homeland which one has only read about or heard parents' stories about was for some hard. But for all those who felt strange, out of place or disappointed, there were those who felt as though at last they had returned home:

I suppose I was a bit lonely [at home]. I am a family-based person. I like family and I'm an only child here. So arriving at the train station with this horde of people all with flowers ... the only person I'd ever met was my grandmother ... it was quite a shock. And it was lovely, it was so lovely that I actually had family and that there were other people called S. in the world and ... after six weeks I was at home ... I really felt at home. It was quite lovely. I didn't want to come back.... It's strange, because quite a few people I have talked to here, they say that when they go to Poland, they don't feel Polish. They say that they're strangers there, although they say they're Polish when they're here. I don't have that problem at all. I'm at home when I'm in Poland.<sup>99</sup>

Another who felt that his visit to Poland accentuated his sense of apartness from British society was 'Jurek' (Leicester) who travelled to Poland first in 1958 when he was eleven years old:

There was a feeling that ultimately, in a sense, this [Poland] is my home. My link with this is stronger than my link over there [Britain]. I was brought up

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97 Notes from interview with H.S. (Edinburgh), 16 July 1993.

98 Tape B/7/KD.

99 Tape B/27/EB.

over there, I speak that language, I work there ... but it's not really my home. I'm a stranger there, an outsider...<sup>100</sup>

Another respondent quoted earlier, 'Kazik', expressed similar feelings about his sense of belonging, although his reactions to Polish ways were somewhat more ambiguous. He admitted to leading 'almost a schizophrenic existence' whenever he went to Poland:

On the one hand I feel myself very very quickly shedding all this emotional constraint one grows up with in England and very rapidly acquiring Polish habits.... I find I acquire this mannerism very rapidly which is quite bewildering because I've only been to Poland three or four times in my life.... And so the strange thing for me when I go to Poland is that I suddenly find myself being drawn into this approach, this mentality. And I feel like throwing caution out of the window, all my English reserve and so on is cast aside. I'll rant and cheer with the best of them in Poland. And yet sometimes you get a situation in which you find that people are behaving in an extraordinary fashion around you, and you feel, 'Hold on. This isn't the way to behave.' And then suddenly you find that the Englishness comes back with a bang and you think 'Oh my God, what am I doing here?'<sup>101</sup>

This provides a fascinating insight into the way in which we absorb the customs, ways, mannerisms of the society around and often remain unaware of those assumptions until they are challenged by crossing ethnic, class or national boundaries. (Then they are either reinforced, or undermined, or adapted as necessary for the context.) In this case we are dealing with a 'British' Pole having to face up to the gulf in assumptions about appropriate social behaviour which exists between him and native-born Poles. This is something that will be pursued elsewhere, but it is worth emphasizing that apart from factors such as relative material wealth and the political situation, which many referred to, there were many more subtle differences encountered — ways in which not only Polish society had changed, but the Poles in Britain had changed too.

The political aspects of moving from an émigré environment to communist Poland were referred to only obliquely. However a kind of defensiveness or 'auto-censorship' could be detected in some travellers who, while in Poland, did not want to talk about the exile government or their participation in Polish scout parades, but on returning also found it equally difficult to talk to parents about the realities of life in Poland.<sup>102</sup>

There were a number of reasons (apart from the political motivation) adduced as to why some respondents had not been to

<sup>100</sup> Tape B/17/JP.

<sup>101</sup> Tape B/28/KN.

<sup>102</sup> B. Sulik, 'Przemiany społeczno-kulturalne wśród młodego pokolenia Polonii brytyjskiej a zagadnienia więzi z krajem', in H. Kubiak (ed.), *Forum Polonijne* 1974, Warsaw/Kraków, 1976, pp. 142–3.



Poland, or had been rarely, or did not travel over as often as they might. First of these was financial. Not all Poles had prospered to the extent that they were able to afford a holiday in Poland, especially if they had a large number of children. 'Helena' (Leicester) confessed that she had never been to Poland, the main reason being the fact that her parents could not afford to take four children. But a further consideration was that she had no immediate family remaining there: her mother had been orphaned in Poland and her father's family had all come to Britain. Only distant cousins remained. More instrumental reasons for visiting Poland surfaced in comments from 'Basia' (Leicester):

I enjoy going over there. I've just been over for a couple of weeks with the children and I like it. I enjoy going there as a holiday. There's some nice scenery. I mean if we went we always said that we'd like to get a chalet or something by one of the lakes and spend a holiday there. But for the amount of money it costs to go over there, you could have a nice holiday in a country we haven't visited yet. It was just for the children to speak Polish. That's most important — that's why we go over.<sup>103</sup>

She admitted though, like most of her contemporaries, that returning to Poland permanently was not an option she had seriously considered.

Few of the second generation are idealistic enough about their Polishness to want to move to Poland. Those that have travelled there to work since 1989 have mostly gone on a temporary basis, sent by their firms and at generous rates of pay. Only one of the couples I interviewed had taken the step of buying property in Poland (interestingly, a villa in the pre-war style!), but significantly they had not grasped the nettle of moving out to it. A further couple had a foot in both countries; the husband, having been seconded to a Polish Government Ministry from his City firm, was established in Warsaw, while his wife was continuing her career in London. Some of those I interviewed were quite happy to convey information and views about the experiences of friends who had 'returned'. Their reactions combined admiration with scepticism about the wisdom of such a step. However few of those I spoke to felt that they could find a place in the Polish labour market or, perhaps more to the point, could match the standard of living they already enjoyed. Disruption of children's education and the unwillingness to leave behind elderly parents were other factors mentioned.

An interesting outcome of this line of questioning was that a small number of individuals who had hitherto represented themselves as being 'ultra-Polish' confessed that they did not see present-day Poland as being in any way relevant to their sense of identity. They felt 'Polish' but it was a Polishness beyond the limitations of identification with the post-communist republic. One female respondent (born 1949) confessed that

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<sup>103</sup> Tape B/22/BT.

she had only been to Poland once in her life and felt no need to go again. Hers was, she explained, a different kind of Polishness. There was a sense almost of the realities of present-day Poland 'interfering' with her vision of Polish identity — of the idealized vision she had inherited from parents and community institutions.<sup>104</sup> Another respondent (male, of the same age) maintained that he felt 'more patriotic' than Poles from Poland.<sup>105</sup> In his case there seemed to be something of the feeling, expressed on other occasions, that *choosing* to maintain Polish ethnic identity in such a context was superior to inheriting a national identity by mere coincidence of geography and birth.

This is a strange sentiment, almost arrogant in its view that the homeland does not measure up to the expectations of Poles in Britain. The attitude derives perhaps from a strong posture of moral superiority adopted by leadership elements of the *emigracja*, mindful of the sacrifices made by the exiles in the Polish cause. In summary, it seems that Sulik is right to conclude that for most younger generation Poles the 'homeland' is too foreign to be regarded as theirs, and yet too close and familiar for it to be attractive through being exotic. And secondly, that their relationship to Poland is tied up in a curious way with their relationship to their parents.<sup>106</sup>

### *Marriage, the Life Cycle and Cultural Continuity*

The elaboration of norms for marriage choice is an important strategy for any ethnic minority that wishes to retain its distinctiveness. Whether to allow individuals to cross ethnic boundaries and marry 'out' (exogamy) is frequently a vexed question and one which divides families. Often, in situations where encounters between members of different groups are unavoidable, elaborate sexual stereotypes are developed to give added support to overt or implicit regulation. In some cases mystical sanctions are invoked to protect the purity and homogeneity of the group. Even where there seems little cultural basis for continued endogamy, the issue can still arouse lasting debate and deep divisions.

The attitudes of Poles towards exogamy and its consequences vary a great deal. In the early days of settlement, of course, given the small number of Polish females, many had little choice, and some of those older exiles who married British wives changed their names or anglicized them. It seems that for many of this group marriage provided an *entrée* into the host society which they were keen to exploit. As

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104 Tape B/41/TC.

105 Tape B/22/AS.

106 B. Sulik, 'Przemiany społeczno-kulturalne wśród młodego pokolenia'.



Dench pointed out in the context of Maltese settlement in Britain, marriage can play an important part in enabling the stranger to find his place in an alien environment. Once the new spouse is accepted, the support network of in-laws and other affinities can replace the loosening ethnic ties.<sup>107</sup>

This is not a consideration that is likely to weigh with the younger generation. Their situation is different. They have grown up in an increasingly cosmopolitan and tolerant society in which they feel at home. Most do not feel themselves to be 'outsiders' in any real sense, and their success in projecting themselves into white-collar occupations and middle-class lifestyles makes them potentially attractive as partners. The question in their case is: what are the chances of — and how much emphasis should be placed on — finding a Polish partner?

When asking about the qualities of Polish life, about Polish values and what distinguishes life in the Polish community from that in the host community, reference was frequently made to the strength of family ties and the warmth and support which Polish family life gives the individual. The 'folk image' held of the family patterns of the older generation is one of stable marriages and close interest in the progress of children.

In examining the contemporary Polish community therefore and its future, it seemed worth looking at the way the family was being forced to adapt to changing circumstances; in particular at its difficulties in retaining younger elements as participating members. In this context it is worth stressing again the changes which occur in the course of what anthropologists call 'the developmental cycle'. Just as maturation of the young and their move away to college, university, or employment may lead to a severing of ties with the community of origin, so at a later stage marriage and the birth of children force the individual into decisions which can sometimes bring him or her back into closer contact with Polish community life. Alternatively, of course, they can set the seal on a complete break with the Polish community.

The choice of marriage partner is an important, although not altogether decisive step. I say that it is not altogether decisive because a number of the active younger generation Poles I interviewed were married to British spouses (in almost all the cases it was the husband who was British) and some of those interviewed were children of mixed (mostly Anglo-Polish) unions. The latter included one parish chairman. In three of the Polish communities I visited British spouses were playing an active role in supporting Polish community activities. Other British spouses support their own children attending Polish school or activities such as the folk dance group. Indeed one Polish couple ventured the observation that English partners sometimes made a considerable

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<sup>107</sup> G. Dench, *Maltese in London: A Case Study in the Erosion of Ethnic Consciousness*, London, 1975.

contribution to Polish community life — and were often more dependable than Poles!<sup>108</sup> As a general rule, however, exogamy — marriage outside the group — impedes the transmission of cultural values and tends to draw the Polish partner away from the life of the ethnic community. This is particularly the case where the *wife* is not of Polish descent, since unless Polish grandparents are co-resident or in proximity, the mother is usually chief transmitter of cultural values and traditions to the next generation. A 'British' wife (indeed any partner who is not of Polish ethnic background) is not going to find it easy to pass on these values, and will only rarely see benefit in continued involvement with Polish community or parish life.

Against this background, the question arises of how important marriage choice is to the younger generation of Poles — how much pressure was exerted upon them to find Polish partners. In the course of conversation with one couple, the husband ventured the information that his sister was at last marrying, in her late thirties. She was marrying an Englishman, but parental approval had in the past been repeatedly withheld in the hope that she would find a Polish husband.<sup>109</sup> The degree of overt parental pressure seems to have been low in most cases, although in some families attempts at match-making occurred with varying degrees of subtlety and success. In most cases though there seems to have been an acceptance on the part of parents that, their children's future being in Britain, there was a more than even chance they would find a non-Polish partner.

Only a minority of respondents asserted that they 'knew' they were going to marry a Polish partner, although many stated that it had been their preference, and it was important to them from the point of view of passing on cultural values. 'Tadek' (Manchester) for example, indicated that he had no doubt in his mind that he would eventually marry a Polish girl, even though he had been out with English girls as a teenager.<sup>110</sup>

'Daniela' rebelled against Polish community life as a teenager. She was never a member of the KSMP, for example, and indicated that she had preferred English friends 'because she did not want to be different'. Both she and her husband, J., recalled how their parents would try to push them towards a Polish partner. 'Daniela' became wary of her parents' attempts to find a 'suitable' (i.e. Polish) partner for her. However quite by chance they met in the Polish Club, their families having engineered their meeting at the parish *opłatek*. They later married.<sup>111</sup>

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108 Notes from conversation with D.L. (Melton), 18 September 1993.

109 Tape B/36/WT.

110 Tape B/18/TR.

111 Notes from conversation with D.L. (Melton), 18 September 1993.



How else are future partners encountered? Respondents had met through the scouting movement, dances, weddings, organised tours to Poland, the Polish Catholic Youth movement, and the Association of Polish Students. No-one confessed to having used the matrimonial columns of the *Polish Daily* (although they were not asked a specific question on this). But since most of the ads placed in the matrimonial section are from and for older people — increasingly for the over-fifties — it seems unlikely that this course was resorted to.

Although a few of the second-generation Poles encountered married partners from within their own local community, they seemed to be the exception. In this second generation Poles are closer to the Israeli kibbutz children who, having been brought up in close proximity, come to regard each other as 'brothers and sisters'. There is a tendency to want to go further afield in search of a partner.<sup>112</sup>

It is difficult to arrive at a figure for the degree of out-marriage, but on the fragmentary evidence (statistical and anecdotal) available, it must be high — certainly more than half of those going through institutions such as Polish Saturday school. 'Daniela' from Melton, quoted earlier, recalled that none of her Saturday school contemporaries were still in the town, and that most (females) had married English husbands.<sup>113</sup> The statistics of births and marriages cited in chapter 4 provide further evidence of this trend. In the Polish parish in Coventry during 1993 only four children had been christened and two couples married, as against the nineteen funerals which took place.

But where the continuity of the ethnic community is concerned, we are interested in cultural as much as biological reproduction. The choice of marriage partner determines the degree to which Polish culture and traditions can be passed on to children within the (new) household. The question of precisely what is retained and passed on — the degree to which cultural traditions are diluted and a core of what might be called 'folk tradition' remains — must be discussed elsewhere. But even where a Polish partner has been found (Polish from Poland or British-born Polish), the degree of Polishness transmitted — and the degree of community participation — are still open to question.

Many decisions have to be taken at this stage: How are children to be named — with Polish or English names? Are they to have their Christening (and later their First Communion) in an English or Polish service? Are the godparents to be British or Polish? What language is to be used with children in the home? Are the children to be involved in Polish community life (for example, Polish school) as their parents were?

Important questions then face young parents from an ethnic minority background beginning to raise children of their own. How much of

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<sup>112</sup> Tape B/32/JA.

<sup>113</sup> Notes from interview with D.L. (Melton), 18 September 1993.

their ethnic minority culture — of the culture and traditions of their parents — do they wish to pass on to their own children? How highly do they value it? How do they assess their own experience — for some enriching, for others highly stressful — of an upbringing ‘between two cultures’? How *capable* are they of passing on cultural traditions, particularly the language, if both parents have been brought up in Britain?

The answers to such questions vary widely, but to the extent that second-generation parents want to maintain Polish culture and pass on Polish cultural values to their children, it is clearly easier to achieve this if they are not living in isolation but form part of a like-minded community. Such questions therefore focus the attention of many young couples on where they are going to live, and what access they are going to have to an organized Polish community. The large and lively community in Ealing, west London, has acted as a magnet to many couples who want to ensure that their children have access to Polish social and community life: that they can attend Saturday school, join the Polish scouts and have a chance to form friendships with other Polish children. Most second-generation Poles who retain continuing contact with Polish community affairs have some idea of which local communities are ‘lively’ and ‘active’, and which are in decline. Indeed some respondents expressed a sense of envy for their peers who were living in the more developed centres of Polish life such as the London communities, Slough or Bradford. By contrast, one couple I interviewed (husband British-born, wife from Poland) confessed that they had moved to Luton because they were aware that a Polish community existed there, but that since moving they had been disappointed by what they had found. There was a relatively low level of community activity and little participation by younger members.<sup>114</sup>

Second-generation Poles in their thirties or forties frequently become involved in community activities when their children start going to Polish school, Polish scouts, the Polish dance group and so on. As one young mother said, ‘It’s not until later in life that you’re conscious of the fact that you had the best of both worlds and you want to pass something on.’<sup>115</sup> She and her husband had joined the School Parents’ Committee, the Circle of Friends of Scouts (KPH), had become involved in ferrying the children to activities, sewing folk dance costumes, organizing camps and so on. Some of those interviewed claimed that they were more active than their parents had ever been and pointed to the irony that they had been ‘rebels’ in their teens, having cut themselves off from Polish community activities for a time.

When I was doing a dissertation for my BEd degree I interviewed my brother in law. At the time he wasn’t that interested in maintaining his contacts with the

<sup>114</sup> Notes from conversation with R.G. (Luton), 15 September 1993.

<sup>115</sup> Tape B/11/TK.



Polish community — or in maintaining his Polishness. He seemed to think that the English side of his life was more important. I think now, over the past decade he has got much more involved as his children have grown up. He's in the scouting movement, his children go to the Saturday school....<sup>116</sup>

'Bronek' (Manchester) stated that having been involved in Polish community activities during his childhood, he had only begun to get involved in community activities again some three or four years earlier. From the early 1970s he was, as he put it, 'just trying to make ends meet'. He became involved in the KPH as a result of his daughter's joining the girl scouts.<sup>117</sup>

After 'Kasia' was married and her children were born, for five or six years she had very little contact with the Polish community. She returned and became involved only when her daughter started Polish school:

It went full circle. Now that my daughter is going to Polish school, I get involved. She's in the Guides and I get involved. She's dancing (with the Polish folk dance troupe) and I'm involved.<sup>118</sup>

Although she used the term 'full circle', 'Kasia' stressed that she was far more involved in community activities than her parents had ever been.

'Kazik' became active in his Polish parish in south London when his children were born. Before that he and his wife, who comes from a Polish community in the North of England, used to attend mass at the local English Catholic Church: 'We began to be drawn in when the children started to go to Saturday school — and we started to make a lot of Polish friends....'<sup>119</sup> Now, he said, they had quite a wide circle of Polish friends of similar backgrounds.

But the second-generation Poles, those in their thirties or forties, for the most part lack a direct link. Their involvement is mostly by proxy — they have been drawn in because their children are involved. There is little in the organizational structure of the community at local level to attract them (except committee administrative work). Some communities have choirs, or sports teams, and in a number of communities there have been attempts to maintain the links fostered in childhood and teens by forming clubs for young married couples (*Młode Malżeństwa*). But people often find that such ties are more readily prolonged in an informal setting.

A number of those interviewed indicated that when their children in turn left to go to college or university, that would be the end of their involvement with Polish community activities. Many felt that the quality

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116 Tape B/22/BT.

117 Tape B/17/JP.

118 Tape B/7/KD.

119 Tape B/28/KN.

of Polish community life had altered irretrievably from that which they remembered from their childhood:

When we were children ... mother was in the choir.... We went to Polish school ... and all the 'akademias'.... Everything was focused because we went to everything ... the Guides ... there was no segregation really. It was not like it is now.... We were just one big community, one unit. Every time we had a concert like the third of May, everybody performed at it. But now it just seems that the Dance Group perform elsewhere, the Guides do something else ... the unity is not there...<sup>120</sup>

Others were conscious of the fact that community participation involved commitment and, at times, sacrifices.

You can do too much. You can get involved in too many things. And at the end of the day you lose out because you've got so many things to do that you neglect your own home, your own family, because you are doing things for other people.<sup>121</sup>

The implication then is that in certain (possibly most) communities there are so few people prepared to take on responsible roles within the organizational structure (parish committee, Saturday school teaching, etc.) that much work falls on the shoulders of a few 'committed' workers. These give up much of their free time in order to keep things running. They risk in the process neglecting their families.

Adolescence and the transition to adult life as represented by leaving school, the move to higher education or first employment is usually crucial in loosening immediate ties between the individual and his family, and local Polish community. For some, this is a liberating experience, it widens their horizons and enables them to mix with people of similar interests, or develop new interests. Equally, for these, Polish community life comes to seem more and more limited, parochial, backward looking. Increasingly they feel little in common with those still active in the Polish community and prefer to develop social and organisational ties beyond its boundaries.

However, this process of ejection is not reversible. Marriage and the birth of children can have the effect of drawing the individual/family back into contact — and active participation in the community — out of a sense of need to pass on values and culture experienced in the parents' own childhood. There is some evidence too that life-cycle changes operate to the benefit of the community in drawing people back once their children have left home or they themselves have retired. Freed from the demands of child-rearing and career, left with more time on their hands, many want to reactivate former ties and make more of a contribution to Polish community life than they have been able to do in

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<sup>120</sup> Tape B/22/BT.

<sup>121</sup> Tape B/18/TR.



the past. This renewed involvement in ethnic community activities during the 'third age' is a neglected aspect of minority group studies.

### *Language and Identity*

One frequently finds that ethnicity is related to the symbol of a separate language rather than to the actual use of a language by all members of an ethnic group.<sup>122</sup>

With an immigrant minority population which is well established, and where a second generation has grown to maturity, the issue of language maintenance and language shift — establishing the degree of bilingualism present, particularly among the second generation — can be an important indicator of ethnic cohesion. The maintenance of the Polish language in Britain has been hampered by a number of factors. In the first place contacts with the homeland, and the possibilities of linguistic renewal, were limited during the early years. Secondly the community has become dispersed, and in some cases Polish households are relatively isolated. This has meant that the use of Polish for young people is restricted to a few particular 'domains' whereas most of their social encounters are taking place in English. Nevertheless younger-generation Poles are often claimed (by their parents), or will claim themselves, to be bilingual.

Indeed a degree of bilingualism on their part was often essential in the early years: their linguistic skills were an important asset in many households. A number of the respondents talked about the inability or the unwillingness of the older generation to learn English properly. As we have seen, in some instances this had meant the children having to accompany their parents to doctors' surgeries, to offices and shops, help with filling in forms and so on:

I noticed about my parents' generation that although they worked in an English firm, a lot of their free time was spent among themselves — in the Polish Church, in the Polish Club. And they only used English when they needed to communicate with other workers and when they went shopping. So it was noticeable that for many of the older generation, their English was poor. They relied on the children for filling in forms and remain dependent to this day....<sup>123</sup>

Bilingualism has been defined as the ability to function 'in two language environments, regardless of fluency and literacy'.<sup>124</sup> Although most people would assume the term to mean equal facility in two languages, that interpretation is not made clearly in this 'minimalist'

<sup>122</sup> G. Devos, 'Social Stratification and Ethnic Pluralism', p. 442.

<sup>123</sup> Tape B/10/WJ.

<sup>124</sup> V. Saifullah Khan, *Bilingualism and Linguistic Minorities in Britain*, London, 1977, p. 1.

definition. In the literature on bilingualism moreover there is often discussion under the terms 'mother tongue' and 'other tongue' where the 'mother tongue' refers to that spoken literally by the mother, or parents, being derived from the country of origin of the migrant group. But this implies an order of fluency, which for second generation Poles, is highly misleading. Few of those born outside Poland and educated in Britain would claim a greater fluency in Polish than in English. For most of them the language used in the domestic setting (with parents, though not with siblings), takes second place to that used in the classroom of their English school, in the playground, on the football field and in other settings with their peers. The Polish child has from the very beginning tended to use English in more 'domains' than he uses Polish. Even in the major domain of Polish usage — the household — the increasingly prominent effect of mass media (radio and television, with now video, satellite, cable stations) has had an inhibiting effect of the transfer of Polish culture and language.

Two points need to be made here. The first is that within the immigrant family, especially where there are three or more children, there is an observable tendency for the first child to speak better Polish than his younger siblings. Correspondingly the youngest will often be the weakest. The reasons for this are fairly straightforward. It is the eldest child who has the earliest and most exclusive contact with parents when Polish alone is being used within the domestic group. He or she may also have frequent contacts with grandparents if they are co-resident or reside in the vicinity. His/her Polish is often therefore fairly well developed before going to English school. For younger siblings however, there is already, from earliest childhood, an English speaker within the household — their older brother or sister. They will not enjoy the same frequency or exclusivity of contact with parents, and will tend to absorb more English terms even before they have started English school.

The second point is that of the *quality* of language used by family members in the home, since we might expect that this would have a profound effect upon the child's facility in the 'mother tongue' and his self-confidence. In the early settlement community even where 'Polish' was the main language used in the home, there was no guarantee that it was a very 'correct' form of the language. Some of the children attending Polish schools in the 1960s and 1970s came from homes in which rural dialect was used and in which levels of literacy or grammatical structure were not high. Naturally this caused problems in the classroom where they found that the 'mother tongue' was insufficient; what they had absorbed from their parents was not necessarily what was required from the teachers.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> K. Sword, 'Ethnic Identity and Association', p. 13.



Where does this leave us with bilingualism? Firstly it must be accepted that in the Polish community as a whole and at local level there are great disparities in linguistic ability with spoken and written Polish. If, however, we accept the 'minimalist' definition of bilingualism offered earlier (i.e. the ability to 'function in' two language environments), then it can be seen that even those with a relatively poor command of Polish can be termed bilingual. It does not need a particularly strong active command of the language to 'function' within a language environment; indeed a largely passive command is often enough to get by. One frequently finds that within the home a kind of linguistic convention is observed between the generations. The parents will give instructions or ask questions in Polish, where the child will either reply in English or else carry out the allotted task, thus displaying his comprehension. So communication within the home often takes place across the language boundary.

A further feature is lexical borrowing, which leads to a 'mixing' of languages. It is a process which occurs very easily and is observable even among newcomers from Poland within a very short time of their arrival. The Polish that emerges in conversations with family members or close friends is usually a kind of 'patois' (what one young wife in Ealing called a 'creole' form) of Polish and English. In speaking Polish, either because key items of vocabulary are lacking, or because there is a shorter, perhaps more appropriate English term, elements of English are drawn in, incorporated into the flow of the sentence with appropriate Polish endings.<sup>126</sup>

This process of linguistic 'absorption' is a common occurrence with linguistic minorities and is something that began to take place as soon as the earliest large-scale Polish-British contacts began in the 1940s. It has been periodically commented on in the *Polish Daily*, as letters to the editor have complained about the slackness of other correspondents or of contributors in this regard. However it is a process that has increased momentum among the generation brought up and educated in this country, the majority of whom find it easier to express their thoughts fluently in English, rather than Polish. There is frequent acknowledgement that the Polish of the second generation respondents is of poor standard. References are made, for example to 'kitchen Polish' — i.e. to the low level of language needed for communication in the domestic environment and in casual, everyday encounters. Another couple used the expressive term 'ponglais' to refer to their domestic mix of 'polonais' and 'anglais'.

For a number of those encountered, their command of basic Polish had a certain value in its use as a 'secret code'. One could speak to friends or family members without, hopefully, being understood by

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<sup>126</sup> For example, E. Sekowska, *Język zbiorowości polonijnych w krajach anglojęzycznych*, Warsaw, 1994.

those around. However some also had cautionary tales about this; Polish is more widely spoken and understood, than even many members of the Polish community appreciate. One respondent corrected herself: 'It's something that nobody else knows — at least, a lot of people don't know.'<sup>127</sup>

But growing up in a Polish community where such a 'code' was widely used and understood among one's second generation peers could have its problems too — particularly when one ventured outside the community. One young woman left home to pursue her studies and, at university, discovered that she had problems communicating with people who did not understand what words such as *czaj* (i.e. *czajnik*, kettle) or *szlafy* (*szlafrok*, dressing-gown) meant. There was, she maintained, not the same 'clicking' (a sense of comradeship, communication, intimacy) as with her Polish friends at home.<sup>128</sup>

In the marital home, as contrasted with the family of origin, most respondents confessed that they spoke little if any Polish. This was the case where one of the partners was British and even the case where both partners were from Polish families, except and unless, of course, one partner (or both) were from Poland itself. The concept of passing on the language to their children existed as an ideal, but for many the efforts and sacrifices involved were too great. Teresa K. gave her opinion that the Polish language as such had no real value in this country. She and her husband had tried to speak to their children in Polish when they were little, but this had faded once the children started to go to school.<sup>129</sup> Most other respondents confessed that little Polish was spoken at home, English being generally the language of communication. However the distinction between the home of their parents (family of origin) and their own household (conjugal family) should be borne in mind. Many confessed that they could not bring themselves to speak English with their parents. Furthermore, in some instances the parents (and in most cases now also grandparents) were co-resident or adjacent to the young couple, and hence more Polish would be used than in the isolated nuclear, second-generation family.

There was a widely-expressed desire to speak Polish to young children in their early years. This may be due to hopes that the child will grow up to be bilingual, but may also be related to behavioural patterns instilled in childhood. Anna Wierzbicka has suggested, in the context of bilingual (Polish and English) families in Australia, that patterns of code-switching may reflect the greater appropriateness of Polish for expressing affectionate attitudes towards children. She has in mind, particularly, the Polish use of diminutive forms, both of children's names as forms of endearment:

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<sup>127</sup> Tape B/39/IM.

<sup>128</sup> K. Sword, 'Ethnic Identity and Association', p. 146.

<sup>129</sup> Tape B/12/TK.



In Polish families, children are generally smothered with affection — both physically and linguistically. In Anglo-Saxon families, linguistic sobriety is matched by physical restraint.<sup>130</sup>

The parents, especially the mother, will wish to employ the same endearments she recalls from her own childhood — the ones that have meaning and intimacy for her.

However, the desire to maintain Polish as the language of the home usually founders unless one of the partners is from Poland, and even then it is not always successful. Respondents stressed the difficulties, as children grew older and started to bring home work from school, in maintaining an adequate level of linguistic facility. These are problems faced by all linguistic minorities, but accentuated where they are dispersed in small pockets, and where the language does not receive support in school. Second generation parents increasingly sense that their vocabulary is inadequate, that they lack the linguistic tools to put across more sophisticated concepts and ideas. Recourse to English then becomes inevitable, despite the best of intentions. A respondent from the North of England, teacher in a Polish Saturday school, pointed out that within his family, '... although we have all the Polish traditions, during Wigilia [the Christmas Eve supper] we speak English'.<sup>131</sup>

'Basia' pointed out that she had attempted to socialize her children as Poles during their earlier years by spending time at her parents, and even went to the extent of bringing over 'nannies' from Poland to look after the children. Significantly in the early years the whole process had begun to exert a strange and worrying effect on her English husband, who felt marginalized and 'threatened' by this tightly-knit Polish family. Eventually, said 'Basia', 'I think it got to the stage where it didn't concern me ... it concerned me more that my children should speak properly in English, as that was their main language....'<sup>132</sup>

There is a widely held belief in the Polish community that being raised in a dual language environment is not harmful or confusing for the child. Many older generation Poles recall the warnings of English school teachers in the early postwar years that they should not speak Polish to their children at home for fear that it would hinder their school progress — advice which they ignored, generally with happy results. For the second generation, though, the problems can be of a different order. Serious difficulties were encountered by one Midlands couple in trying to bring up their eldest son 'Stephen' to be bilingual. They had had an agreement that they would talk to their children in Polish.

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<sup>130</sup> A. Wierzbicka, 'The Double Life of a Bilingual' In R. Sussex and J. Zubrzycki (eds), *Polish People and Culture in Australia*, Canberra, 1985, p. 192.

<sup>131</sup> Tape B/18/TR.

<sup>132</sup> Tape B/22/BT.

Well, Stephen couldn't speak a word of English until we came here. And then the woman at the playschool said, 'What on earth are you doing to him?' We said, 'We're teaching him two languages.' She said, 'You're tearing him to bits. He hasn't got an identity. He can't relate to anybody.' We both agreed that she was absolutely right. She said, 'You two talk over his head in English, but you talk to him in Polish.'

I used to drive him to nursery school with two or three English children, and as they spoke to me in English, he translated into Polish for me. He couldn't work it out. You see, he was on his own. We had moved out then (from town to village) and he used to go to Polish school — which he hated. But he had no other contact with anyone Polish.... We'd moved away from regular contact with the Polish community.

With their subsequent children, they started in English from the outset feeling that it was artificial and unfair, in the circumstances, to try to teach them another language: the costs were too high. 'Beata', the mother, also commented that although her Polish was good, she would not have had the rapport she had with her sons now, had they persisted with Polish.<sup>133</sup>

This highlights the problem that the second generation face — even those who want to maintain Polish culture and traditions. Having grown up and been educated in Britain, it is no longer natural or easy for most of them to converse in Polish. Unlike their parents, many of whom had limited opportunities (or indeed limited need, given the mechanical nature of the jobs many had) to learn English, the second generation are for the most part more at home speaking English than Polish. They are not in the main going to 'return' to Poland — as was their parents' expectation for many years — so the motivation for linguistic maintenance is not the same. They are bombarded with English from all sides — from school, radio, television, press, computer and so on. It is unreasonable, therefore, to expect all but the most proficient Polish-speakers in the second generation to be able to teach their children Polish to a high level of fluency. Most recognize this and they display an indulgent attitude both towards language acquisition and towards attending Saturday school: 'I think we've both decided that as long as they enjoy it, they'll go. And then perhaps there will come a point when they're older ... but I'm certainly not going to force them.'<sup>134</sup>

Attitudes on both language maintenance and Saturday school attendance, as in other areas, vary widely. Some of the respondents had such impressive language facility that they could manage Polish reading materials without any trouble. The main problem for such people, almost all of whom are in the professions, was one of finding the time, given their other commitments. Few of those I talked to — particularly outside the London area — read the *Polish Daily*, although in a few cases it was passed on by parents. One or two read technical manuals in

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133 Tape B/15/BM.

134 Tape B/22/BT



Polish — materials that bore on their work. This had the twin effect of reinforcing their knowledge of Polish while at the same time adding to their technical knowledge. However, one respondent made the point that technical Polish was easier to follow because in so many fields it had made wholesale borrowings of English terminology.

A small number of interviewees claimed that they made a point of cultivating their language skills: reading Polish literature and listening to Polish radio were two methods used. This zealous minority referred to language maintenance as being 'important' and in one or two cases adopted an uncompromising hardline, 'patriotic' approach to their children's attendance at Saturday school which contrasted strongly with the more tolerant, 'laissez faire' attitude of other parents encountered. A handful of the more affluent employed 'nannies' or childminders from Poland for their children — a step calculated to enhance the children's linguistic proficiency.

Interestingly, the respondent (quoted above) who confessed to speaking English during Wigilia had related with pride how, during his teacher training period, he had encountered teachers from Poland who had mistaken him for a fellow (Polish-born) Pole. They had asked him how long he had been in England. Similar stories were rare, though. 'Bożena' was proud of the fact that she spoke Polish well, that people asked her when she had come over from Poland. She admitted that there were problems of maintaining the language with the younger children, but had decided against sending them to the local Saturday school. The quality of Polish spoken by other children seemed to be the problem (at home they would hear a more correct, adult form of the language): 'I don't want them to speak Polish in this sloppy, baby way that is so embarrassing and I can't stand listening to.'<sup>135</sup>

Most of the second generation either referred to their self-consciousness and embarrassment in encountering Poles from Poland, or their sudden awareness on travelling to Poland for the first time that their language skills were either not entirely appropriate or adequate. Several referred to having doubts about their grammatical deficiencies. One ardent and committed Pole bemoaned the problems she had with *koncówki* (appropriate grammatical endings). She admitted that she had problems with getting her mouth around 'formal Polish'.

There is a widespread awareness that the Polish spoken in Poland is different, that the Polish learned from their parents is the language of a bygone age, in many respects quaint and antique. Several respondents related with mortification how they had prompted outbursts of laughter and giggles when they tried to communicate with friends or relatives in Poland. ('We don't say that any more.') One respondent compared the

situation, in an English context, to someone using the tone and expressions of P.G. Wodehouse's characters.<sup>136</sup>

Difficulties surfaced in understanding the latest slang spoken by visitors from Poland: 'It is important to recognize that the language is developing without us — just as the English language is developing.'<sup>137</sup> But this is a problem which develops very rapidly for the emigrants and is not only experienced by those who were born outside Poland. It is certainly experienced by the older generation and even those who left the country in the 1960s and 1970s often comment on the linguistic usages that have developed since their departure.

The quality of Polish spoken in the community is in decline, as many Saturday School teachers will testify. This would not be so important were it not for the significance that Poles themselves place upon the language as a boundary marker. The strength of this linguistic tradition and the emphasis placed upon it is due to historical factors. The continuity of national identity was strongly linked during the nineteenth century to maintenance of language and culture. There is a sense though in which this tradition now works against the community. Those who do not have an acceptable level of fluency are regarded (and sometimes treated) as outsiders, eventually coming themselves to question their credentials as Poles.

### *Identity and Religion*

The network of Roman Catholic parishes has long effectively formed the 'backbone' and organizational hub of Polish community life. Although associational life flourished outside the church ambit, and the dominating ethos of the postwar settlement was its political-military origin, nevertheless Polish mass was the only occasion on which Poles of all ages, backgrounds and views came together. With the ending of the community's political 'role' the Roman Catholic church has increasingly become the main focus of ethnic mobilization and organisation. It is widely agreed that if the Polish community is to have a future, particularly now the political motivation has gone and the Ex-Combatants' Associations are declining in numbers and influence, then it would be based around the Roman Catholic parishes. But the Polish Church too faces problems.

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<sup>136</sup> There are similarities in Polish literature and folklore with the lone Polish emigrant in America, described by novelist Henryk Sienkiewicz, who attempted to maintain his knowledge of Polish by reading from a translation of the Bible every day for twenty years. With time he developed into an anachronism, a figure from the past, speaking a language that nobody used any more. H. Sienkiewicz, *Wspomnienia z Maripozy*, in *Pisma. Nowele*, vol. 6, Warsaw/Lwów, 1933, pp. 33–47.

<sup>137</sup> Tape B/29/KN.



Language shift is one of the factors which places a question mark over the long-term future of the Polish Catholic presence in Britain. As we have seen above, the younger generations not only have greater facility in English, but there are dwindling numbers with sufficient fluency in Polish to be able to learn their catechism, take religious instruction, understand the sermon, or indeed to give confession in the language. Another problem faced by the clergy is the increasing fragmentation and geographical dispersal of the Polish community both inside and, particularly, outside London.

The changes which have occurred over the past half-century mean that the tasks faced by younger Polish priests (many of whom have arrived since the 1970s) are every bit as complex as those faced by their predecessors in the 1950s. Most priests now have cars. The increased mobility which car-ownership gives them is essential for home visits and hospital visits, given the distances they have to cover and the fact that an increasing proportion of the faithful are now elderly and housebound. Indeed many priests working alone are torn between attending to the needs of the elderly and attempting to devote more time and attention to the younger members of the parish, in particular children. Although they are aware of how dependent the Polish elderly are, they are conscious also that if Polish culture and identity are maintained, then it is to the children that they must look.

Upbringing in Britain has enabled members of the second generation to familiarize themselves with British Catholicism — many of them after all were educated at Catholic schools in Britain. The English language is no longer a barrier for them as it was for their parents. Also in many cases, having moved away from the city centres which were the locus of Polish community life in their parents' day, it is more convenient for them and their families, if they have remained practising Catholics, to attend an English language mass. Hence the Polish priest is faced with a twofold 'pull' - of linguistic facility and convenience - away from the Polish parish, which he has to work hard and imaginatively to counter.

Second-generation Poles are in an excellent position to compare the style and 'tenor' of the two Catholic traditions — and in some cases to express a preference. But while similar descriptive terms were used for the Polish church, there were wide divergences in how these particular attributes should be judged. For example, many respondents referred to the more 'traditional' style of the Polish mass and Polish parish life generally. At times 'tradition' was being viewed in negative terms, as for example when one respondent commented on '... the tradition going back to Poland that the priest was *above* everyone else. The English priests have made a greater effort to get close to the parishioners.'<sup>138</sup> Another expressed disappointment with 'the level' of what went on in

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<sup>138</sup> Tape B/19/JP.

the Polish Catholic Church. 'It's very traditional' he continued 'and I think that people go because of habit rather than due to any particular belief.' He confessed that he went more frequently to English mass — which he 'gets more out of' — although he regarded himself as a Pole and was active in Polish organizational life.<sup>139</sup>

The Polish priest was frequently portrayed as belonging to a rural tradition in which, commonly, he was the only educated person in the community. In such a setting he was a community leader and his voice counted. Many recalled from their childhood the forceful, domineering personalities of Polish priests who had 'ruled the community with an iron hand'.<sup>140</sup> Others referred to 'splits' (factional disputes) which had occurred in the past — often centering on the parish — which had led to disaffection and disillusionment with Polish community life. Such events seem to have occurred more frequently in the 1960s and 1970s when the older generation of priests who had been wartime military chaplains retired. Blame was often laid at the door of the incoming priests who, it is said, were not familiar with the unique character of the Polish community in Britain — in particular the political-military ethos and the dominant role of the ex-combatants — and seemed to assume that, as with the mainly peasant settlements in the New World, they would be the focal point of community life, a beacon to which all looked for direction and leadership.

But in urban Britain, with a congregation which included highly educated and skilled people from a variety of fields, the priest could not afford to adopt the same haughty tone, without the risk of alienating his parishioners. Significantly, many of those who expressed most trenchant criticism of the Polish clergy were linked in some way with the scouting movement. (This, perhaps, represented a validation of the view that the Polish scouting movement developed a sturdy character and independent thought in its members.) There was felt to be a lack of humility about the Polish priest, a determination to maintain a position of superiority and 'talk down' to parishioners. All this was contrasted with the more 'homely' style of English mass, symbolized for some in the way the priest would meet worshippers at the door as they left the church.

This distinction between the two traditions is an interesting one. Although there is no space here to embark on a detailed investigation, it is worth reporting the comments of one young woman who observed that the Polish Church in Britain was a missionary church which had in the past been controlled, and had certainly taken its lead and character from the Polish hierarchy in Warsaw. But in the postwar period Poland had been behind the Iron Curtain, cut off in many respects from the Vatican and Western developments in theological debate. The Polish Church had been more concerned with withstanding the ideological

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139 Tape B/27/AR.

140 Tape B/11/WJ.



assault from the communist authorities than introducing change and reform. The liberalizing provisions of the Second Vatican Council had passed the Polish Church by. Only with the political changes in Poland following 1989 could gradual liberalization take place.

Another criticism was that Polish mass, and Polish parish life, by comparison with English Catholic parishes, always seemed to be inward-looking. They was too narrowly-focused and too little concerned with wider problems. As one person said, 'We always seem to be praying for ourselves.' Another informant in south London pointed out that parishioners were asked for contributions for a new church, for new stained glass windows, to decorate the church or for causes in Poland (church-building, the Catholic University of Lublin) but there was rarely any concern showed for the Third World or victims of disaster situations.<sup>141</sup>

However, not everybody felt this way, or felt that there was an equivalence between attending a Polish or an English mass. Some expressed a liking for the specific character and more traditional element of Polish worship. One respondent in the Midlands expressed himself quite bluntly: 'I don't like English churches — particularly the more modern ones. If I go to mass in English, I don't feel as though I've been.'<sup>142</sup> Few of his contemporaries felt this strongly, although another admitted:

I'm all in favour of continuing with the Polish parish because I think it's a sound basis for the language. There are certain things that are different in the tradition of the Polish Church — and it's very, very traditional and conservative. [Asked if this was something that appealed to him: 'Yes'.]<sup>143</sup>

Another respondent, a young mother from the Midlands, stated:

We feel more at home in the Polish Church because we've known that all our lives.... We're known there ... we know most of the people there. But we don't know half the people in the English parish.<sup>144</sup>

A further respondent mentioned the benefits of special children's masses introduced in the Putney parish in south-east London; the younger children were led away to have separate instruction during the service, which was more entertaining for them and allowed the adults to worship in peace.<sup>145</sup> This indicated, it was suggested, that the more progressive Polish priests were prepared to learn from their English colleagues.

On balance it was possible to distinguish a number of rationales for attending Polish mass. These could be loosely grouped as: a)

<sup>141</sup> Interview with I.G. (Clapham), 2 March 1993.

<sup>142</sup> Tape B/1/HA.

<sup>143</sup> Tape B/15/BK.

<sup>144</sup> Tape B/12/TK.

<sup>145</sup> Tape B/43/JL.

‘sentimental’ (‘it’s what we’ve been used to since our childhood’); b) ‘instrumental’ (‘it helps to maintain the language’); and c) ‘social’ (‘all our friends go there’). There was little reference to national/patriotic reasons, or the specific character — music, anthems, etc. — of Polish Catholicism. But it was interesting to hear respondents mention the ‘traditionalism’ of the Polish Church in positive terms, since it was the ‘traditional’ aspects which were most frequently mentioned with disapproval by others. It seems that a distinction is made between the ‘tradition’ in terms of the liturgy, anthems, hymns (viewed positively) and ‘tradition’ in the sense of the relationship between priest and congregation (often viewed in negative terms).

The anticipated presence of friends and acquaintances was an important element in the choice of whether to attend Polish or English mass. Church attendance is an important venue for renewing contacts and for catching up on news and gossip. But equally, within the smaller declining parishes where young people are drifting away from the church or are attending mass closer to home, the social element is missing and its absence can be a deterrent: ‘Only the elderly go along to mass. I don’t see any of my friends there...’<sup>146</sup>

The second generation are far more likely than their parents though to be affiliated to two parishes. Many families find difficulty in juggling the claims of the English and Polish parishes to which they are affiliated:

We mainly go to Polish mass. Since the children have started going to a local Catholic school we have tried to involve ourselves more in the life of the local English parish — but it doesn’t really work out, mainly because we try and look after our parents a bit as well. Henry’s mum is on her own and we give her a lift to church. Then we pick up my Dad.... We try to go to English mass about once a month, just to show our faces and to show that we’re involved in the English parish as well. You see it goes back; we can remember ourselves when we were children. Our parents weren’t involved in the English parish as much as we would have liked them to have been.<sup>147</sup>

We can see from this that a conflict of loyalties arises between claims of Polish and English parish, which are sometimes accentuated by the conflicting pulls of older (grandparents) and younger (grandchildren) generations.

In similar cases where the parents were members of the Polish parish but the children were attending English Catholic schools, the decision of whether to have an English or a Polish First Communion had proved a difficult one. While on the one hand the children wanted to please their grandparents by having the ceremony in the Polish church, there was a strong wish also to be with their school friends and ‘conform’, to be part of the peer group. In at least one case encountered during the

<sup>146</sup> Notes from interview with W.K. (Manchester), 23 September 1993.

<sup>147</sup> Tape B/12/TK.



research, children from Polish families had been involved in *two* First Communion — seemingly, one would think, a logical impossibility but offering a compromise. It was not made clear in this case whether the priests involved were aware of the duplication. By contrast, another case in south London was reported to me where a Polish priest had refused to give communion to a boy who had taken his First Communion in an English Church — reputedly on the grounds that he did not believe that the English Church (locally or generally, this was not made clear) prepared children adequately. This, though, was an extreme case of underscoring ethnic-religious boundaries and I did not hear of it happening elsewhere,

The continuity of Polish Catholic tradition was of inestimable value in helping the older generation to recover from the traumas and loss they experienced during the war years and to adjust to conditions of exile. Its value as a mainstay of ethnic minority culture and values is coming under threat as the second generation gives way to a third. The argument that ‘our ways are different’ holds true for some, but for others holds little conviction, since it is argued the Catholic Church is a universal church.

The complexities of the situation — and the problems associated with regarding Polish Catholicism in terms of a boundary marker in British society — were reflected in an exchange with a second generation couple in Ealing. Most British, argued the husband are Protestants and most Poles are Catholics, ‘So you associate being Polish with being Catholic.... Not only are you different in origin, you’re different in religion.’ But, observed the wife, when they went to church they nearly always tended to go to an English mass! Their children went to an English Catholic school — although it was pointed out with some mirth that the intake was predominantly ‘Irish’. Their children had had First Communion in an English Church — they had ‘a strong loathing’ for the way it was done in Polish church. Why?

Well, it’s still done basically as I was taught. Learn the catechism, you know ... the Devil, SIN! Fire and brimstone! And they learn it all off by heart. It hasn’t changed ... the nuns do it. So I said, ‘Absolutely, no’. You see, my son once said to me (because they have religion in Polish school), ‘Mum, is it the same religion?’ You know, because it was taught so differently in English school, as opposed to the Polish school — that he just couldn’t believe it was the same thing. We go to the Polish church on Christmas Eve, or when there is a mass for his [husband’s] father, or when the kids have to go because of a Scouts thing....<sup>148</sup>

The wife described herself as being ‘not very religious’ and admitted that there had been ‘hassles with the nuns’ because the children did not know Polish well enough to understand their religion at Polish School.

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<sup>148</sup> Tape B/40/ML.

She resented, she said, having to work through this with them as well as help with their English homework.<sup>149</sup>

The main anomaly in this encounter was that the Polish Catholic church and its traditions were presented to me initially as a boundary marker — as a prime example of what separated and distinguished Poles in Britain from the host population. However, the ensuing conversation indicated that the ‘content’ of this marker (in terms of affiliation, allegiance, attachment) was minimal, although perhaps what was most important was that the couple — certainly the husband — *wished* to believe that it existed. Perhaps we may paraphrase the words of George Devos (cited at the head of the previous chapter) that ethnicity is related to the *symbol* of a separate religious tradition, rather than its practice by all members of an ethnic group.

In assessing the significance of the Polish parish from a sociological point of view — as a focus of social activity and organization — it must be made clear that there is no ‘typical’ parish. Polish parishes can be ranged on a scale from the moribund to the active and highly organized. Also evident is that, while external factors such as the local labour market, affect the chances that younger generation Poles will be able to find employment and remain in the area, the character and policies of the Polish priest can have a profound effect on how successful the parish is in mobilizing the ethnic community, in recruiting disparate Poles and making a claim to their loyalty.

In several parishes a younger generation of priests have had an invigorating effect on parish life. One respondent from south-west London referred to the number of younger generation Poles in the area who wanted to maintain Polish cultural values and needed the parish:

We’ve got a very strong group. We’ve all known each other for the last 10–15 years. We came through studies together and by some fluke a lot of us have settled in this area. And so we’ve got a good core of people who’ve known each other for many years. I think that what we have realised is that we want to keep up the Polishness, and in order to do that we need the *parafia* and we need the *harcerstwo* — these are what we grew up with and we need to keep them up. But we’ve got to have a priest who will help us to keep them up and be sympathetic towards our needs. What we pressed for is that the kids have got to be interested and want to come to mass. There has to be something in it that they enjoy. Otherwise we’ve got churches which are closer to hand. There are three local Catholic churches around the corner. It’s more of an effort to get up to Putney ... So we have got to be recompensed for the extra effort we’re putting in. We’ll put our work into it, if you [i.e. priests] perform as well.<sup>150</sup>

This is the voice of the younger generation which is committed to maintaining Polish identity and looks to the Polish parish and religious tradition for support. Conscious that the military-political ethos has no longer any hold; it is on a more lasting foundation that they must base

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149 Ibid.

150 Tape B/43/JL.



their sense of national-ethnic identity and that of their children. Some of this more committed group also see Polish parish life as a refuge from the moral confusion and uncertainty of British society. Overall though, there is a drift of young people away from Polish parish life. Many have disappeared into the religious 'melting pot' represented by the Catholic Church in Britain.

### *The Newcomers from Poland*

In an earlier chapter dealing with the statistics of Poles in Britain, it was pointed out that newcomers had been arriving in small numbers since the late 1950s — the Polish 'thaw' of 1956, which followed the death of Stalin. In the course of the ensuing four decades many thousands of Poles received permission to settle in Britain. The most common reason for remaining was marriage to a British citizen, although there were other special circumstances — political flight and appeals for asylum, the care of elderly relatives domiciled in Britain, or special skills (intercession on behalf of applicants by employers). According to Sheila Patterson, in the period prior to the 1970s 75 per cent of those settling in Britain were females. There is no reason to think that the gender balance has altered in subsequent years. Most of the newcomers can be allocated to the following categories:

(a) those arriving to marry Poles of the older generation (or arriving as visitors and marrying subsequently). These newcomers, predominantly female, arrived mostly in the late 1950s and 1960s. There was a considerable age gap between them and their spouses of up to twenty years. (One example was encountered of a woman who had arrived in 1972 aged twenty-two to marry a former soldier in the Polish Second Corps who was thirty years her senior.) These were usually drawn into the local Polish community through their husband's links, and became involved in different ways. Because of the age difference involved, by the late 1970s many of these women were already widows, and were bringing up teenage children alone;

(b) those arriving to marry Poles of the second generation (or arriving as visitors and marrying subsequently). These newcomers arrived from the 1970s onwards. Again, the majority were female but in this case the age gap between partners was not pronounced. The members of this cohort were in general better educated than their predecessors — some to university level — and many became active in Polish community life, particularly as teachers in Saturday schools. However others have remained uninvolved, although they may speak Polish and cultivate Polish traditions within the home;

(c) those arriving to marry British partners (i.e. British citizens not of Polish descent). This group is most difficult to characterize. Some of those encountered have careers and family lives which keep them away

from Polish community life. Others make greater efforts to retain some degree of contact with organized Polish life, even if it is only through sending children to Polish school;

(d) the 'singles' who arrived either as political refugees or else used marriage as a means of settlement in the United Kingdom, but are otherwise unattached;

(e) the 'couples' who arrived — mostly in the Martial Law period of the early 1980s — and were granted leave to remain as political refugees.

The early arrival of newcomers — though small and providing an infusion of much-needed fresh blood to the community — was regarded with ambivalence by the established community. Although many newcomers have since made a considerable contribution to the life of the community (as parents, of course, but in an organizational sense especially as Saturday school teachers) and the earliest arrivals are now well established members — some are grandmothers! — a certain wariness or ambivalence about new arrivals from Poland can still be detected. In the 1960s and 1970s they were not infrequently shunned because, coming from communist Poland, they were suspected of being agents of the Warsaw regime aiming to infiltrate the *emigracja*, or at the very least, as people infected by the propaganda of the regime. But stories also circulated at an early stage in the history of the *emigracja* about women arriving as 'fortune hunters' from Poland — marrying elderly Poles in the expectation of gaining both a British passport and a sizeable inheritance. The use of marriage as a means to gain permanent residence and ultimately British citizenship is part of community folklore. In the past it was an obvious loophole for someone who whether for political reasons, or for economic reasons, or a mixture of both, simply wished to establish himself or herself in Britain. In some of these fictitious marriages, a cash transaction was involved.

Although I did not target the 'newcomers' as a part of this survey, I did nevertheless interview a number who were involved in Polish community activities, or were the spouses of members of the second generation, or whom I met by chance in the course of carrying out this study. Some admitted that they had contracted marriages purely for the purpose of remaining in Britain. However it must be stressed that despite the notoriety of such cases, evidence suggests that only a minority of 'newcomers' have employed such methods.

This prologue is by way of explaining some of the reactions received during interviewing from members of the second generation towards their 'fellow-countrymen and women' from Poland. The term 'import', which is used in reference to new arrivals from Poland and is regarded as a somewhat derogatory term, was used with a show of embarrassment or distaste by a number of the respondents. This was especially the case among those who felt strongly that the *emigracja* was part of Poland and that barriers between the Polish community in



Britain and Poland itself were artificial. Nevertheless, the existence of a social boundary between British Poles and new arrivals was frequently acknowledged.

One young man ('Adam'), upon being asked whether he had a preference for a Polish partner when he married, queried whether I meant 'Polish born in Britain' or 'Polish from Poland'? When I indicated that I meant 'Polish' in both senses, he countered:

Ah, but I think there is a big difference you see — a big difference — and it is something I have discussed quite regularly with friends.... Quite a few of my friends have always said that you never go out with a girl from Poland because they are 'passport-chasers'. There is this term 'import', which I hate to be honest....<sup>151</sup>

'Adam' however pointed to the difficulty of passing on Polish traditions without a Polish wife, and confessed that he (currently) had a girlfriend from Poland. However this was causing some tension within the family. Adam's mother — herself a postwar arrival (in the late 1950s) — had not shown great tolerance towards her son's companion:

No, no. This is the funny thing.... My mother arrived in the 1950s ... and another woman, the mother of a friend here who arrived in the 1950s ... these are the people who warn you, 'You must be very careful with girls from Poland, because they only want to catch a husband and settle down here'. And I think, 'Yes, but what did *you* do?' I tell my friends, 'Look, this is what your mothers tell you, but look what *they* did.'<sup>152</sup>

There was a slightly different sense of inconsistency contained in a response from a married woman in west London:

It's a funny thing, but when we met in the 1960s the only way for Polish girls to stay in England was to marry. So on the whole boys would be slightly wary of such girls ... in case the only thing they wanted was a British (passport)... you know, to stay. But, in fact, nearly all my husband's friends have married girls from Poland ... only one or two haven't.

A further respondent (female, mid-forties) maintained that Poles brought up in Britain had a very strange relationship towards those who have come over from Poland. She expressed a more pointed criticism:

A lot of girls of my age or slightly younger than me — let us say, that are now in their late thirties or early forties — resented the 'imports' very much. Because we wanted Polish husbands and there were these girls coming over from Poland and marrying off these eligible men ... and there weren't that many eligible men.<sup>153</sup>

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151 Tape B/26/AR.

152 Ibid.

153 Tape B/27/EB. Also Tape B/42/W&JT.

If this sense of jealousy and resentment at the loss of prospective partners was widespread among second-generation females, few were ready to admit to it. This was the only interview in which such sentiments were expressed. The question arises of why such young women did not seek partners from Poland. The answers would include a) lack of opportunity for meeting young Polish men; b) natural wariness of motives of those encountered; c) concern about practicalities — such as how a foreign husband would earn a living in Britain.

There were other reasons adduced for steering clear of partners from Poland. One mother living in the Midlands (married to an English husband), mentioned unbridgeable differences in attitudes and ways of thinking. She herself had been encouraged by her parents to keep the traditions going, but had not been under any pressure to marry a Polish husband. She could never have married a Pole, she maintained:

I think the mentality, the thinking, they're something completely different. The Poles of my age brought up over there, I don't think I could have got on with. Polish women adapt more easily when they come over here; perhaps it's desperation to better themselves.... Others obviously do fall in love. You can guess what Poles from here are thinking, more or less. There is no way you can guess what they're thinking over there.... They're more open here, the Poles in England.... That's the difference (perhaps it's because of democracy) that we are able to say what we think and what we feel, and Poles are not. And there's that barrier, that you really don't know that person at all; you don't know what they're thinking. Are they resenting you for saying what you're saying? Are they shocked by what you're saying?... You can't get close enough to them.<sup>154</sup>

Similarly a young man in his thirties confided: 'I would have sooner talked to the older *Polacy* in the Club, than the new *Polacy* from Poland, because they were unapproachable, there was something lacking....'<sup>155</sup>

These are fairly uncharacteristic assessments of the Polish character in so far as they present Poles as being almost oriental in their inscrutability. Most Poles would think of their national character as far more outgoing, spontaneous — exuberant even — than the British. However, it may be that what the first respondent was trying to convey was her concern about the hidden agenda, the ulterior motives, that have often governed and guided the actions of incoming Poles — those who wish to have some temporary work (illegally) during their stay, or to establish a foothold in Britain, and are in some cases prepared to make use of their compatriots in order to achieve this.

One couple in Ealing, having talked about the Polish societies they joined at university contrasted this sense of common bond and shared understanding with the feeling towards newcomers arriving from Poland:

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<sup>154</sup> Tape B/23/GW.

<sup>155</sup> Tape B/1/HA.



One of the things a Polish friend of mine said about people coming from Poland was that these were people who felt that they could never trust one another, whereas we felt we could trust one another.... They spoke in euphemism and metaphor, they hinted at things.... There would be a lot of half-truths around and you would have to work out what their past was ... what their ambitions were ... what they were really after ... and no-one really knew. This was in the early 1980s, just after Martial Law was introduced.... You never asked questions really. You spoke a little bit about yourself, but it was considered very rude to ask, say, 'What do you do?' 'What are you doing here?' 'How long do you expect to stay?' And now it's deeply ingrained in the social culture — that you don't ask these kind of questions.<sup>156</sup>

But it is only fair to point out the inconsistencies in some of these replies, reflecting perhaps the underlying confusion that questions on this subject caused. The latter response was from a young woman who had stated, at an earlier point in the interview that she 'loved' newcomers from Poland and felt 'comfortable and accepted' by them.

The conduct of the new arrivals with regard to work and consumption was also a point of criticism, although again, views tend to conflict, almost to the extent of cancelling each other out. Many of them, it was said, were aggressively materialistic. They were absorbed with work at the expense of getting involved with the Polish community. As one respondent maintained, she did not get on at all well with Poles from Poland since 'they seem to have different values. They seem to be totally money-oriented. What you have and how you look seem terribly important to them, especially the 1980s lot....'<sup>157</sup>

On the other hand respondents talked about newcomers expecting to be handed things on a plate. It was claimed that new arrivals often did not realize that people had to work so hard in the West. Some condemned the newcomers in quite extreme terms:

The young people who come here are bandits and lazy individuals. They do not think of honest work, but only of stealing something and getting drunk on beer. It is not worth helping them in this; they create a terrible image of Poland.<sup>158</sup>

Two points need to be made here. The first is that references to newcomers from Poland often do not distinguish between those who are 'settlers' and those who are 'visitors'. The latter arrive on holiday for periods of weeks or months and often seek some form of paid employment either to help pay for their trip, to finance further activities (tours, English lessons), or else to take back a sum of money to Poland. In the communist past, the relatively high, black market value of the pound and other Western currencies against the zloty made this worthwhile, since considerable wealth could be accumulated in a relatively short period of time. So in the past many visitors worked long

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<sup>156</sup> Tape B/33/IM.

<sup>157</sup> Tape B/40/ML.

<sup>158</sup> J. Bolek, 'Sciana placzu', *Dziennik Polski*, 11 October 1989.

hours, often doing more than one job, in order to accumulate large sums of money. Hence also the observed tendency of many newcomers to talk exclusively in terms of earnings, exchange rates and the cost of various items. With the introduction of market reforms in Poland and the rise in value of the złoty, such holiday employment has become less rewarding.

The second point is that a similarly negative reaction is encountered on the part of many newcomers and visitors toward the 'settled' Poles who offer them work: 'There is no worse employer for a Pole than another Pole.'<sup>159</sup> The belief among many is that it is better to work for a British employer than a fellow Pole who is more likely to pay lower wages and exploit the newcomer's lack of knowledge about alternatives. Yet this does not prevent newcomers ('visitors' presumably) from seeking temporary employment in Polish clubs. A young woman involved with the White Eagle Club in Balham confided that Poles often rang and expected things to be fixed for them *na lewo* even though they had no work permit.<sup>160</sup>

For the incoming 'settlers' it is quite a natural reaction to want to devote themselves to work, given the insecurity of life in a new culture and the need to establish a new material base to life. It was, after all, very much what the earlier cohort of wartime émigrés had to do from the 1940s onwards. Related to this 'excessive materialism' though are further charges; that many such newcomers had little time or interest for participation in Polish community life. They were prepared to bring their children to Polish Saturday school — but only because it was a free child-minding service. They were reluctant, it was said, to contribute or put themselves out in any way for extra-curricular activities (for example, bringing children to rehearsals was mentioned). A number of respondents pointed out that for newcomers from communist Poland the concept of unpaid voluntary work was an alien concept not easily understood. They assume people are paid, it was said. After all, in communist Poland all such activities were controlled by the authorities.<sup>161</sup>

But there is a further reason for such reluctance. Many newcomers did not feel the need of such activities to reinforce their sense of being Polish. They had left Poland under different conditions than the 1940s exiles, had been shaped by a different Polish environment, and were less idealistic than their predecessors. Also they found the form of Polish culture they encountered less than appealing. An interesting example in this regard is that of a young girl who arrived from Poland and married into a Polish community in the Midlands. She could not, though, be induced to join the local Polish folk dance group:

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Notes from conversation with K.R. (Balham), 4 February 1993.

<sup>161</sup> Notes from interview with I.G. (Balham), 2 March 1993; also Tape B/40/K & ML



She wasn't interested. We were interested in the Old Poland — in the dancing and singing and prewar times — while they weren't — they were modern. At least they *wanted* to be modern ... they were interested in business, making money. I think we had one vision of Poland and they had a different vision. I had a vision of Poland of farming, hard-working people ... having great times, singing and dancing.... I think they were embarrassed about the vision we had ... and I was embarrassed by the vision they were trying to portray to me.<sup>162</sup>

This is a significant portrayal of the way in which divergent perceptions of Polish identity and the way it should be maintained completely fail to find common ground: one person living a romanticized rural ideal, filled with the nostalgia inherited from parents for the Poland of their childhood; the other from postwar Poland with completely different memories, perhaps of a greyer existence, with queuing and food shortages the order of the day. The one self-confident in a society within which he has grown up, using the folk-dance group as a 'peg' on which to hang his identity and not afraid of demonstrating his ethnic affiliation and renewing his allegiance; the other with no doubt at all as to her Polish identity and no need to prove or demonstrate anything, but rather the opposite — a desire to melt in and not be too conspicuous in her new surroundings.

The simple truth is, of course, that whereas every Polish community in Britain of any size has its own folk-song and dance group, this is not an activity in which young people in Poland would normally engage. Western-oriented youth in modern Poland would probably view disco-dancing as a preferable Saturday evening pastime.

Exiles and expatriates often choose to elaborate and exaggerate particular customs and traditions of the home society — whether it be 'high tea' for the expatriate English in India or the flourishing of cricket teams in the Dordogne of the 1980s. Scots Canadians preserve the traditions of Scottish country dancing and regularly return to Scotland to take part in competitions. But how many first generation immigrants from Glasgow or Dundee would be interested in such activities?

At the extreme there were newcomers who not only shunned the Polish community, but seemingly wanted to assimilate as rapidly as possible — and not only those who married English spouses: 'They often want to become English, to speak English at home.'<sup>163</sup> In one Midlands community, a respondent observed:

The woman I spoke to in the Club today whose parents-in-law were a pillar of the Polish community, they've changed their name. And she said, 'My children have got to live in this country. They've got to get used to not being laughed at....' She believes her children's future is in this country, yet she herself came over here from Poland. Her accent is markedly Polish....<sup>164</sup>

<sup>162</sup> Tape B/1/HA.

<sup>163</sup> Tape B/29/KN.

<sup>164</sup> Tape B/23/GW.

Another respondent, divorced from a wife who had come from Poland some twenty years earlier, talked of her 'obsession to become really English'.<sup>165</sup> A further case was described to me in Scotland of a Polish family who settled in the area after martial law. The family were banned from the Polish Club when the father was heard scolding his son for speaking Polish: they were living in Britain now, argued the father, and the boy should accustom himself to speaking English.<sup>166</sup>

Such behaviour is regarded as unpatriotic and is incomprehensible to those second-generation Poles whose parents did so much to maintain Polish culture and traditions. It is a betrayal, a negation of all their parents' generation had worked for. It reinforces perceptions and prejudices — that the newcomers are 'less patriotic' and less committed to Polish culture than the active, even second-generation, members of the Polish community.

Indeed the curious view was expressed to me on several occasions that 'We' (that is, Poles born in Great Britain) are more patriotic than 'They' (newcomers from Poland). One south London woman said openly, 'We weren't born in Poland, but we are more patriotic than these newcomers.'<sup>167</sup> Initially it seemed far-fetched, even ridiculous, that people in their thirties and forties who had lived all their lives in Britain, having holidayed in Poland on a few occasions, should make such a claim. Like the Polish second-generation author who pointed out to his audience that he was more patriotic since, unlike those who had been merely born in Poland, he had been born outside the country and had *chosen* Polishness. These 'younger-generation Poles' were raised in exile, but in the traditions and disciplined values of a community which sought not only to build a life for itself, but also to live up to certain standards; to ensure that they did nothing to disgrace the reputation of Poles in British eyes — and, by extension, since much of that reputation had been based on the sacrifices made in World War II battlefields — to sully the memory of their fallen comrades.

Hence, when incoming Poles act in such a way that they draw upon themselves the attention of the British authorities then there is concern:

... it's not their fault; they were brought up in Poland to be 'anti-establishment', so they come over here and they are still 'anti-establishment'. And you get a lot of 'problem Poles' coming over ... there are rip-off merchants and what have you. This is the feeling within the Polish community, sort of ... you know, ruining the Polish name.<sup>168</sup>

This raised wider concerns among some émigrés about the moral environment created by the communist regime in Poland — in

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165 Tape B/10/WJ.

166 Notes from conversation with Mr 'W.J.' (Kirkaldy), 19 July 1993.

167 Notes from interview with I.G. (Balham), 2 March 1993

168 Tape B/27/EB.



particular about the upbringing and socialization of young people. The effects of communist rule upon the homeland, it was argued, had led to a lack of respect for the law, lack of moral sense and a sense of being 'entitled' to something from society.

In a more concrete, personal situation the same respondent commented:

There was only once that I ever disowned Polishness and that was when I was at a party where, once again, it was full of 'imports'. My husband is an architect and he had prepared some drawings for this girl, who then did her house and had a house-warming ... and the behaviour was so horrendous that this Englishwoman said to me, 'Are you Polish?' And I said 'No' because I was so embarrassed. And that is the one and only time.<sup>169</sup>

Another 'patriotic' member of the second generation expressed hostility towards the people who had left Poland in the 1980s, referring to them as 'scum'. He contrasted this group with what he called the 'quality people' (his parents' generation) who had remained in Britain after the war. 'What the newcomers have been doing basically is ruining the reputation that the established Poles have for hard work.'<sup>170</sup>

It is not easy or meaningful to generalize about the social class of the newcomers, although among them are a large number who seem to have started or completed higher education. Some have the skills and know-how to set up their own businesses or consultancies — in computing, or translating, for example. But despite the appeal that emigration traditionally holds for the average Pole the move to Britain does not always bring immediate benefits for such people, particularly if they cannot find employment in their area of expertise. They find themselves initially declassed in occupational terms, much as the lawyers and career army officers from the older emigre generation during the 1940s.

A correspondent to the *Polish Daily* wrote of 'two Polands' coexisting in London

... one is the older Poland created by the Polish emigracja and the second, the new one, has been peopled by Polish youth. Both Polands live apart and alone. The first is dignified, lofty, overbearing, filled with distance and distrust. The other — entrapped by the pursuit of time and money. Both differ from each other — although only in appearance.

Young Poland has also exercised the choice which will remain the stamp of its future life. These are after all young people, for the most part students or graduates of universities or polytechnics, who here in London are searching for the chance of a better life than that they faced in Poland. On the whole they are not thinking of returning. For them a free Poland means above all unemployment, inadequate housing and rising prices. They therefore renounce their aspirations, doubtless at great cost, and frequently risk humiliation and people's meanness. They also renounce the language of their homeland, since here Polish is only the language of the underground, suitable for restaurant kitchens and the economic hinterland.

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Tape B/14/BK.

It is a struggle for existence no less difficult and painful, since their aspirations and dreams are suppressed by the gurgling of the water closet or the clatter of plates being washed.... So they hustle about these future lawyers and teachers between the cafe tables, these future doctors and specialists in Polish studies run with the Hoover up and down the hotel stairs....<sup>171</sup>

Most of the newcomers have settled in London and the South-East, where the largest Polish concentrations are found. Here they are settled in dense enough numbers to form their own social networks, and many only occasionally come into contact with the institutions of the Polish community. The smaller and more distant Polish settlements received relatively little fresh blood of this kind, and those that did arrive found, not infrequently, Polish community life in the provinces to be frustratingly tedious. This is particularly the case of an educated person from Warsaw or Kraków, for example, who finds himself or herself in Rugby, Falkirk or Leamington Spa.

Expectations are high and not always fulfilled, but it is hard for the newcomer to backtrack — to return home and admit that he or she made a mistake. Such is the force of the emigration ethos which has built up in Poland over the past decades that one leaves, but only rarely does one return. Sending back presents and parcels is one of the means by which one confirms to families left behind that a level of prosperity has been achieved. The political and economic changes in Poland since 1989 have slowed down the exodus, but not the desire to leave. Poland, being now a democracy and having a market economy, is regarded as a 'normal' country by Western politicians; its citizens are no longer able to claim asylum as political refugees. The chances for most of being able to emigrate legally are low. Yet opinion polls show the desire to emigrate — particularly among the young — in the early 1990s is still very high, not least of course because of the high unemployment which has resulted from the economic reform programme.

This in the final analysis is what divides the younger generation of Poles from the newcomers, and what they cannot forgive the 'imports'. Even if one forgets linguistic differences and the embarrassment that some feel about their lack of vocabulary, or grammatical inaccuracies; if one forgets the excessive acquisitive tendencies that many newcomers display; if one ignores the unfamiliarity that newcomers have with the background and traditions of the *emigracja*; there still remains the fact that whereas the second-generation 'patriots' have been reared in the ethos that the homeland is a source of pride and distant, unfulfilled longing, each newcomer shatters that image a little further, particularly given the sometimes quite strenuous efforts they have made to *leave* Poland.

This, added to the lack of enthusiasm for Polish community involvement which many display, creates a barrier. Yet logically, there

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<sup>171</sup> J. Baranski, 'Dwie Polski', *Dziennik Polski*, 17 May 1994.



is no reason why the newcomers should all adapt to the ways of the established community. They are not, for the most part, political exiles; they moved to Britain voluntarily, either for emotional reasons (marriage) and/or because they wanted to be a part of a more affluent society where day to day living is easier, less stressful. For most, especially those married to British partners, there was an acceptance that assimilation into the mainstream of British life for their offspring was unavoidable. They were not awaiting with impatience a dramatic change of regime in Warsaw that would enable them to return to the homeland. They therefore had less reason to maintain Polish language and traditions in their children except in so far as it facilitates contact with relatives in Poland, or is of use as a second language qualification. Indeed, many regarded such measures as artificial and backward-looking.

Of course, the second generation criticize from a position of comfort and security. Not having been brought up in 'People's Poland' some have little idea of the tremendous strains the everyday struggle for existence involved. Also the fact that second generation Poles make critical comments about the newcomers they have encountered does not mean by any means that they are reluctant to travel to Poland or find Poland itself any less attractive. Moreover, not all respondents were entirely negative about the impact of new arrivals. Several informants admitted to having a lot of friends among the Poles who had arrived in recent years. In one case, the Polish girls married to English husbands who had been encountered in the Midlands were described approvingly as 'lively socially'.

In summarizing this section, one would have to reiterate that it is extremely difficult to make generalizations about the role and status of the newcomers or about the attitudes of younger generation 'Anglo-Poles' towards them. Many of the new arrivals have been absorbed into the Polish community and play a key role in its organizational structure. The continuing reserve and caution encountered in the course of research centred on the following areas:

1. They (especially those who arrived in the 1980s) are not interested in the Polish community and try to anglicize their children.
2. They (visitors especially) don't realize that in the West we have to work hard for our money.
3. They (both men and women) are just looking for passports.
4. They (visitors especially) expect that because they are Poles we can fix them with employment *na lewo* (on the side, unofficially).
5. They are not church-goers.
6. They use the community structures for their convenience but do not contribute (for example, using the Saturday school as a 'baby-sitting service' while they shop).

But there were also many who had married partners from Poland, those who felt such contacts to be invigorating for the sense of Polishness, and those who claimed to prefer the company of 'Polish Poles'. Much depends upon the individual's experience of newcomers, but attitudes towards Polishness inculcated at home and the sense of identification with the Polish community have also had an influence.

What seems clear is that growing up within the Polish community, many younger generation Poles received an ambiguous message. On the one hand Poland was seen as an ideal, a lost homeland which their parents' generation regarded with nostalgia. On the other hand, they saw newcomers from Poland making desperate efforts to leave Poland — to evade immigration procedures so as to be able to stay in Britain. The newcomers were suspect both on political and moral grounds, and were regarded as not measuring up to the disciplined values of the older exile generation. Many newcomers, for their part, found the tenor of local Polish community life as both introverted, culturally limited and stifling, and were happy to remain apart from it.

### *Generations*

Generational differences exist in the Polish community as in most others. But they are more marked in immigrant communities generally, since the child who grows up to maturity in the new society absorbs its norms and values much more quickly than the parents. On the one hand this creates tensions as the youngster is able more quickly than his parents to manage the cultural patterns and institutions of the host society. But traditional authority patterns are undermined when such youngsters challenge the traditional ways of the minority group — their parents' ways.

Comments critical of the older generation, however, came in the main not from those who had rejected Polishness, but from those who expressed a desire to maintain it. The criticisms of the second generation — those born from the 1940s onwards — were aimed at their parents' generation, people born in Poland and already mature adults by the time of their arrival in Britain, who had taken an active role in community affairs at both national and local level. The charges can be summarized under six headings. First, the members of the émigré settlement had a preoccupation with the past. They were backward-looking and were unable to shake off a seeming obsession with the events of the war years. They had perpetuated a political ethos and a military orientation which had acted as the motivation and justification for the original settlement but were ineffective for the purpose of mobilizing succeeding generations. What were important memories for the older generation were the stuff of history to their



children. The expression 'time-warp' was one which recurred in interviews with the younger generation.

Second, the émigrés' preoccupation with the past led to an emphasis on repetitive activities — such as *akademie*, anniversaries and so on, which permeated the whole community (especially youth organizations such as the Saturday schools and the scouts). The Polish press (*Dziennik Polski*) was seen as a prime example of this trend — anniversaries of historical events were discussed repeatedly; anniversaries of the deaths of prominent political or military leaders of the 1939–45 period were the pretext for further historical analysis; books and albums were produced to commemorate the events of those years:

You see, they keep on celebrating their anniversaries year after year and we look at it and we think, 'Well, it's a time-warp. It's not Poland now and it's not the future of the country.'<sup>172</sup>

Young people often expressed difficulty in reconciling this 'model' of Polish identity with what they encountered in Poland. Some confided that they felt more at ease with 'true' Polish culture (that is, the culture of the homeland), than that of their parents' generation — a generation which seemed to have become stranded and side-lined somewhere along the way.

Third, perhaps as a result of the above, there has been a failure until quite recently to involve younger people in community affairs, and especially to recruit them to the organizational side of things and provide a motivation for continuing Polish culture and traditions. Too much has been created with short-term aims in view. The result has been that large numbers of the second generation have faded from view. They have drifted away, feeling that there is no role for them and failing to see any point in continuing links with the Polish community. One young man in Luton commented bitterly on the failure of the older generation to relinquish hold on the community's organizational structures: 'The elders who built it up didn't want to let it go', he complained. Although most of his friends and contemporaries had now moved away from the community, any contacts still made were informal, between peers. If they did meet up they would rather meet in a pub than at the Polish Club. He added, 'When we wanted to do something there, people just threw it in our faces.'<sup>173</sup>

Fourth, those who have remained in touch with Polish organizational life have not been taken seriously. The complaint is that they are referred to as *młodzież* (youth, youngsters) and treated with condescension even into their thirties and forties. This factor was raised in many conversations around the country, but one exchange in Scotland illustrates it sufficiently:

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<sup>172</sup> Tape B/5/SB.

<sup>173</sup> Notes from interview with R.K. (Luton), 15 September 1993.

Husband: What we find in our generation ... I'm going on forty-five and I'm still treated as a teenager by the older generation.

Wife: ... the everlasting *młodość*.

Husband: That can't go on. We have quite serious jobs in the wider community. Yet we are marginalized.<sup>174</sup>

This irks and irritates those young people (many of them of course highly educated) who outside the Polish community hold down responsible jobs. On the one hand they had Polish traditions and culture pushed at them during childhood, with the injunction to preserve Polish ways; on the other hand, in later life, because they were not old enough to have fought at Cassino, Falaise or Arnhem, they were not considered as fully-qualified members of the combatant-dominated community.

A female respondent in south London pointed out 'I'm forty-two years old and the mother of four kids, but they still treat me as a child.' She went on to offer the view that:

Many young people have left the local (Polish) community because they don't want to be identified as their parents' children. Often it is difficult to be taken seriously in the community where you have grown up.<sup>175</sup>

This was an observation that I encountered elsewhere — the feeling that, particularly in some of the smaller communities, one was always treated as the son or daughter of one's parents, rather than in one's own right.

Fifth is the seemingly unavoidable tendency of the older generation of Poles to indulge in factional infighting. This has been commented on elsewhere. It has often led to splits and the creation of two rival camps within a single local community — the two groups wasting energy competing with each other and duplicating effort. Divisions of this kind have occurred in many communities over the years. Some of these disputes were based upon personal antagonisms, but whatever the cause, they reinforced a view commonly held among younger members of the community that Poles of the older generation find it difficult to co-operate together. One respondent sought to explain this by expounding on the meaning of the word *kompromis* in Polish. For Poles he maintained, the word had ignominious connotations, of backing down, admitting defeat. Poles, he asserted, do not know how to compromise in the British sense — a civilized attempt to meet your opponent halfway.<sup>176</sup>

Sixth are the differences in values and assumptions. The emphasis upon rank and titles, upon formalities; the often poor organization of community events; the interminable meetings, at which elderly Poles,

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<sup>174</sup> Tape B/5/S & IB.

<sup>175</sup> Conversation with I.G. (Balham), 2 March 1993.

<sup>176</sup> Tape B/42/WT.



seemingly entranced by the sound of their own voices, drone on and on. One woman respondent said:

I went to meetings at the SPK which were so boring, you've just no idea. They were dreadful, dreadful. Their way of running meetings and also their mentality is so different from ours ... it's unbelievable.

Questioned as to whether this was simply a generational clash or had more to do with the influences of British ways upon the younger generation, she continued:

I think it's both. I mean you can't separate the two.... They spend five hours talking about whether or not they should give someone the Order of Merit. It's important to them....<sup>177</sup>

In similar vein a younger-generation professional man in his forties:

Not many of the people who are running it are trained in either business matters or how to actually handle the finances, although there are people available to do that. And they [the professionals] are reluctant to get involved with people who won't talk on the same professional, fast level as they do. In mean, I am. I can't stand these meetings for 2–3 hours. [At work] we go into a meeting and we're dealing with £200–£300 million projects — and in half an hour it's over. If we can't deal with £30,000 expenditure in an hour or so, I haven't got time for it.... We're very much faster track in terms of discussion and also in terms of ... organization and getting things done.<sup>178</sup>

There is often criticism of the older generation of community activists, at local and national level, who are strict about maintaining their own Polishness and expect others to be the same. But, either because their stern attitude has prompted rejection, or simply because they have spent too much time on community business and devoted too little to their own families, their own children or grandchildren have disappeared from the Polish scene.

There are voices which claim that some of the above criticisms are not justified, however. For example, in Luton it was argued that although there had been rifts in the Polish community, this was true of other ethnic communities too: of the Irish, for example; and the local mosque, I was told, had two factions. Undoubtedly there is much truth in this. Smaller, face-to-face communities provide the ground for playing out personal antagonisms and differences of view in a wider setting than the purely domestic.

In general, then, there is an acknowledgement of the older generation's achievements but a sense of frustration too that so much of what was built will not survive to be handed on to future generations. There is a sense of sorrow that because of the specific nature of the

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<sup>177</sup> Tape B/28/EB.

<sup>178</sup> Tape B/15/BK.

Polish émigré settlement of the 1940s and its historic role in working toward the ending of communist rule in Poland, more was not done earlier to incorporate younger elements. However there is an awareness too that few of the younger generation, faced with the demands of jobs and families, would be prepared to sacrifice as much for the community as their parents' generation have done. It is for them less of an essential support and less relevant to their daily lives.

### *Ethnic Identity: Self-Ascription and the Future of the Community*

The question of how the younger generation of Poles in Great Britain feel about their ethnic identity has been underlying much that has gone before. In the course of interviewing, the question of Polish identity was raised as a distinct issue. What value did the respondent place on his or her cultural heritage and why, if at all, did he/she think it worth maintaining Polish traditions?

Understandably, the question of identity caused most respondents some difficulty. Even the most articulate needed time to formulate their thoughts. One respondent, a college lecturer in his forties, explained the problem with an expressive analogy: 'It's almost like Louis Armstrong being asked to define jazz. He said, "If you have to ask, then you'll never know."' The reply hinted at something deep and indefinable, something rooted in the 'soul' or the core of one's being. The same individual continued in an almost mystical vein:

It's a mixture of things, a cocktail.... Let me put it this way, if I go for a stroll in the forest near here in Guildford, if I go for a walk in the Alps or in Bavaria, I can appreciate the beauty of the countryside but I don't really feel that I belong there — even in the case of England. It's all very nice, very picturesque, but it's always someone else's.

Alright, I'm a British subject. I've got a British passport ... but I've never really felt that this was mine in the broader sense....

When I go to Poland, I think ... I feel ... this is where I belong. You know, this is the little patch of territory that God decreed for me. And you know it's a strange feeling. Perhaps if you've never been 'outside' it will be difficult to appreciate what it means. And that for me is the essence of Polishness. Everything else I can take with a pinch of salt.<sup>179</sup>

This expression of belonging — of attachment to the very soil of Poland — is characteristic of the more patriotic and 'committed' Poles of the second generation. It is not a sentiment that would be shared by the majority of the second generation though; in fact it is in many respects rare and untypical. Perhaps a more typical reaction was that of the second-generation Pole who said that he felt 'all right' in Poland, but

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<sup>179</sup> Tape B/29/KN.



only really felt at home when he got back to the hills and dales of Yorkshire.<sup>180</sup>

For many of this second generation, especially the children of educated and socially active parents, the image of Poland they absorbed in their childhood was strong and positive. They were instilled with the need to maintain Polish culture and ways, to retain their sense of belonging. What developed was an identity in many ways unique, specific and exclusive. Essentially there were three influences working to shape the identity, cultural make-up and value system of the second generation. First were the cultural values of their parents and the wider Polish community in which the combatant ethic and anti-communist ideology mingled with an exalted sense of loss of homeland. Second were the culture and values of British society absorbed at school, at play, at work and generally in social contacts outside the Polish community.

The third of the influences on the identity of the second generation was the 'authentic' culture of the homeland — in this case coloured by the reality of communist-dominated Poland: an awareness of Poland's state of vassalage, its distorted economy, and circumscribed freedoms during the period 1945–89. It is true that the relationship of some politically aware second-generation Poles was expressed through opposition — by taking part in protests against the communist regime's treatment of its citizens. But the cultural impact of Poland itself was greater on those who visited or had frequent contacts with visiting relatives and friends.

The resulting sense of cultural identity, though, was an amalgam which encompassed all three elements — British society and culture, the émigré milieu and the homeland — but could not be wholly subsumed under any particular one. Just as the second generation are aware of the distance that separates them from their parents' generation, so too they are aware that they are different from visitors from the homeland. As one respondent put it, 'We've got nothing in common with the Poles any more. We feel Polish — but here in England.'<sup>181</sup>

In some respects, although they are quick to draw boundary lines with the host society, paradoxically many are happier within British society — both because its values and customs are more familiar, but also because it is easier for them to stress their Polish identity without having their cultural credentials too closely examined. During a social visit to a young couple in south London, the husband praised his sister-in-law (like him, British-born from a Polish family) for maintaining Polish traditions within the household. She was, he said, very Polish. His

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180 Tape B/19/JP.

181 Tape B/1/HA.

Polish-born wife interjected laughingly: 'She regards herself as Polish but isn't and can't possibly be. Polishness is her *hobby*.'<sup>182</sup>

Regional loyalties and interests also affect the sense of identity. Another respondent working in the City of London claimed that he felt intensely Polish but he attended an English church, did not belong to the club in his south London 'home' parish, nor had he joined a dance group or any of the other institutions in his own community south of the Thames. He did not, he said, have 'any affinity with those people'. When questioned further on the point he replied, 'When you have a community of 100,000 people or more, it is difficult for all of them to feel Polish in the same way.'<sup>183</sup>

It is of course, a valid point. The individual may choose to 'express' his Polish identity in a variety of ways: through membership of a Polish Catholic parish, through political or pressure group activity, through membership of a folk-dance group, a Combatants' Club, a Scout troop. Or through informal ties of friendship and conviviality. These are the group activities that interest the sociologist. But equally the individual may shun such associational activity — for a variety of reasons. Particularly if born in Poland, he may be sufficiently sure of his sense of Polishness that he does not feel the need to rekindle it by periodic bouts of socializing with fellow Poles. Alternatively, he may feel that the human resources of the minority community are too slender for him to find congenial company — that he has 'little in common' with the people who compose this ethnic subgroup. His interests, hobbies, orientations and values have developed beyond the restricted capacity of the ethnic community to satisfy him.

It is part of the strength and uniqueness of the second generation within what has become a multicultural society that most of those interviewed are able to operate on both sides of this ethnic boundary in a way that their parents were not able to in the past and their children will not be able to in the future. They have the facility, the knowledge to manipulate two cultural codes. In a sense they can choose what is best from both cultures. Happily, most of those interviewed are content to do so without necessarily turning their backs on either.

The positive aspect of this dual existence was expressed by a woman in her forties who expressed a sense of pride in her British homeland and rejoiced in being part of a multicultural society. She was also very active in Polish associational life and demonstrated great pride in her Polish background. In particular she felt conscious of assuming the ambassadorial role in her dealings with non-Poles:

When people know I'm Polish and they like me, they will go away and say, 'I knew a Polish girl and she was a good person, so most Polish people ...' You

182 Conversation with P.&R.B. (Surrey).

183 Tape B/22/AS.



know how it is, how most people equate ... and I'm very conscious that I'm actually an ambassador; I'm very conscious of that.<sup>184</sup>

This concern with the image of the ethnic group which is projected in wider society is very much related to the 'anti-defamation' drive of the community in which younger elements are active. It is connected to their sense of obligation to the parents' generation ('who worked hard to make a life for us and gained a reputation for being good workers and solid citizens in the process'). It is in turn connected to the wariness with which newcomers from Poland are viewed — a potentially unruly, turbulent element who may endanger the community's reputation. In general terms the drive for enhanced group image is related to individual and group self-esteem and ultimately to issues of ethnic hierarchy and ranking.

The question of identity and how it is transferred between generations is a thorny one. Strong commitment to Polish culture and identity was associated closely with family background. Either parents instilled in their offspring a sense of pride and a need to perpetuate the traditions or, as happened in several households with which I came into contact, grandparents were co-resident and played a major role during a child's formative years in passing on the language and culture. I give primacy to the family for a number of reasons. First because within a given Polish community where all have the same access to community resources, family socialization is one of the few factors that can account for disparities in ethnic identification. Second, because a number of cases encountered during this study indicate that some children who remain very Polish in outlook had limited contact with the Polish community's associational life — whether through distance from centres of Polish life or parental choice. Third, because it was a factor to which respondents themselves drew attention.

This is not to say that the Polish community and its institutions do not play a part. They do. For many the contacts and friendships established within the community have been a crucial element in their upbringing. The presence of more educated and socially committed Poles (running the Saturday school movement, the parish administrative structure, the scouting movement, running folk-dance groups and so on) has had a marked effect on the character of individual Polish communities. Where large numbers of such people were concentrated and their skills and energies could be tapped, the organizational resources of the local community were enhanced. Their values and aspirations became dominant and they were able to exercise a significant influence on those of more passive outlook — often where parents themselves were not formally educated to a high level but were of worker or peasant origin. (Though one should not underestimate too the

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184 Tape B/28/EB.

ambitions of many Poles from relatively uneducated backgrounds for their children, to make use of the opportunities offered.)

The local Polish communities varied in this respect, but where provincial communities were left with a low number of 'active' members, maintaining Polish organizational life was rendered more difficult. The problems of viability were accentuated in time as the older generation began to die off and educated members of the second generation began to move away. Communities such as Liverpool, Ashton, Stoke and Newcastle are cases in point. The influence of locality and the specific features of Polish community life at local level are important, since they determine whether the young person growing up within the community carries with him into adulthood memories of ethnic community life as rich, vibrant and varied or dull, uninspired and largely irrelevant to his/her aims, aspirations or self-image.

Michael Novak has observed that most Americans develop what might be called a 'pluralistic personality'.<sup>185</sup> Each individual, he asserts, has the right and the opportunity to choose his or her own identity from among the many materials presented by the contingencies of human life. This freedom to manipulate one's identity or self-ascription seems to be much greater in North America than in the older cultures of Western Europe, where there is traditionally less tolerance of ambiguity and the ethnic/national boundaries are more rigid. The question arises of whether it varies from one part of the country to another. Is ethnic diversity tolerated more in the ethnic mosaic of the capital than in the north of England, for example?

A further complicating factor arises north of the border. In Scotland, the degree of exogamy in the Polish community was greater than in the rest of Britain, partly because the Polish troops were stationed there for such a long period during the war, but also because, even after the war, few Polish women settled there. The second generation has largely been assimilated as a result. Apart from being raised by Scottish mothers, an interesting question was raised by a respondent as to what extent the younger generation of 'Poles' in Scotland has become more quickly assimilated (than, for example, Poles in England) because Scottish regional identity is a minority identity within Britain. (In other words, in an environment of relative social tolerance it becomes possible to develop and nurture a minority culture within and outside the home, but it is less acceptable perhaps in a situation where one's minority identity 'clashes' with another minority identity — in this case a regional-national identity with pre-existing claims. It may be too that there is a much greater readiness to identify with what is both a 'strong' (i.e. more focused, less diffused) identity than being merely 'British'.)

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<sup>185</sup> M. Novak, 'Pluralism: A Humanistic Perspective', *The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, 1980, p. 377.



In most interviews the respondent was asked how he described himself in social encounters, and how this self-description was both received and justified. The majority of respondents with both parents Polish maintained that they were 'Polish' — although some qualified this with 'born in Britain'. (Understandably, perhaps, few of those from mixed marriages made the the same claim.) One respondent though admitted that she no longer told people she was Polish: 'I used to but now I don't think that's right, so I'll say, "Oh, my parents are Polish." And that's how I feel — that my origins are very much Polish.' This reply indicated a slight self-distancing from the concept of Polish identity, which was entirely consistent with the respondent's sense of reserve and ambivalence towards her Polish background.

Some admitted to qualms or misgivings in social situations when the subject came up in conversation — often, of course, prompted by curiosity about a Polish name. One man with an engineering consultancy in the Midlands confessed that he described himself as 'Polish', but that he 'had to be careful' in business circles. He generally did not volunteer the information to British colleagues and business contacts unless asked directly, since 'it gets their backs up that I'm Polish ... they do resent it'.<sup>186</sup>

This was not the only case where the individual claimed that ethnic identification in social encounters caused problems. In fact, though, it emerged more accurately from this and other accounts that what social or business contacts objected to was not the fact of someone being Polish, but that a person born, brought up and educated in Britain should not think of themselves as British. It offended their sense of national pride, as well as their logic. It also smacked of ingratitude and disloyalty. Some respondents referred somewhat enviously to the comparative freedom of Canadians and Americans to retain an ethnic affiliation. This was contrasted with the 'relative intolerance here' where 'they tell you you've got to be British'. It is perfectly true of course that in Britain there is no equivalent of the 'hyphenated ethnics' (Italian-American, French-Canadian, Irish-American and so on) of North America, nor the same tolerance of dual loyalties.

Some respondents had a ready made response to objections about their claimed ethnic background and allegiance:

I say I'm Polish. And when they say. 'Oh, don't you speak good English!', that's when I tell them, 'Well, actually I was born over here'. But I do consider myself Polish, basically because both of my parents were Poles. If people say, 'No, you're not Polish', I say — 'Look, if a cat has kittens in an oven they're not biscuits.'<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Tape B/15/BK.

<sup>187</sup> Tape B/7/KD.

The important point about all these respondents is that they were brought up in Polish households and in varyingly compact Polish communities. Even those who have married 'out' and have limited involvement with Polish community life often bear a strong sense of self-identity, of 'roots', from their childhood. There is a realization though that this is not true for their own children, most of whom will be British or 'British of Polish origin'. As several pointed out, 'my son's [daughter's] immediate parental history is England, whereas mine wasn't — it was Poland'. One mother continued that she could not tell her daughter about Poland, because she herself had no direct knowledge — for this the daughter had to ask her grandmother.<sup>188</sup> There is perhaps here an implicit awareness of the inevitability of assimilation.

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188 Tape B/9/GJ.





## 9 Conclusions

Louis Wirth suggested in one of his essays a fourfold classification of minority groups according to their ultimate objectives. A *militant* group aimed for supremacy — to become the dominant group in society. A *secessionist* group aimed at full political and cultural independence. A minority which aimed to preserve its own culture and to achieve this in a wider social system based on tolerance and equality of opportunity Wirth termed *pluralistic*. Finally, a group which was prepared to give up its identity and merge with the dominant group he termed *assimilationist*.<sup>1</sup> But the character and aims of groups change. There is little doubt, as Ernest Krausz observed, that the Polish settlement of the 1940s was a secessionist group according to Wirth's schema. However, as their political goals had receded, they had become more of a pluralistic group and latterly were fighting a rearguard action against assimilation.

Wirth acknowledged that different sections of a minority could retain different objectives. However, the objective that would hold sway over the whole group at any one time would depend, he suggested, on the group's ethos and background, but also on the attitude of the dominant group and the status the minority achieved within its host society. During the postwar period the Polish minority in Britain has been increasingly less of a political exile (secessionist) group in its majority, but the ethos of the leadership elements retained the image and rhetoric to the very end.

The question of whether the Polish minority in Britain can survive as an identifiable cultural community has been prejudged by history. The end result of all such migratory movements over time, asserts Kruszewski, is assimilation.<sup>2</sup> Assimilation has been defined as 'the adoption by a person or group of the culture of another social group to such a complete extent that the person or group no longer has any particular loyalties to his former culture'.<sup>3</sup> Assimilation of individuals

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<sup>1</sup> L. Wirth, 'The Problem of Minority Groups', in R. Linton (ed.), *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*, New York, 1949.

<sup>2</sup> Z.A. Kruszewski, 'Emigracja żołnierska (a perspektywy czterdziestolecia)', in A. Iwanska (ed.), *Fale Emigracji Polskiej*, London, 1990, pp. 27–8.

<sup>3</sup> A.M. Rose, *Sociology: the Study of Human Relations*, New York, 1956, pp. 557–8.



(‘erosion’) increases over time, leading ultimately to the disappearance of the group as a functioning entity. Integration, accommodation and adjustment are terms which have been used to indicate halfway houses on the road to complete assimilation. There will remain of course, as Sheila Patterson has suggested, Polish surnames, and others who will be able to trace their origins back to Polish forebears — much as today many Britons trace their ancestry back to the Huguenots.<sup>4</sup> The only unknown is how quickly such assimilation takes place in a given situation. Social scientists have demonstrated that the process of absorption and assimilation, while related to generation, is not always a purely linear process but can be erratic and complex. Victor Greene has pointed out that ethnic change among Los Angeles Poles vacillated over three generations — children and grandchildren tending to assimilate rapidly, whereas ethnic identity was revived among the great-grandchildren of the immigrants.<sup>5</sup> We have seen in previous chapters that whereas some second-generation Poles have made determined efforts to retain Polish cultural values and pass them on to their children (second generation born outside Poland) — a pattern that would be described by many scholars as ‘integration’ — many others have moved away from Polish life and culture in the first generation, almost rushing to assimilate.

Polish writers have expressed considerable pessimism about the prospects for the Polish émigré settlement community almost from the beginning of its existence. Hence we find Waclaw Zbyszewski writing in 1950:

... we should not count on the fact that the mass Polish settlement in Britain will rescue Polish culture or become the basis of Polish political activity. The whole culture of this group is on a far too low and purely traditional level to be able to be passed on to the next generation born in exile. We will have Britons of Polish descent.... The Polish community here is threatened in the long run with complete absorption. Without trace.<sup>6</sup>

Admittedly Zbyszewski was writing after having visited Polish resettlement camps in the provinces and he was less than impressed with the cultural level of the people he encountered there. Hence the expression of pessimism is both an indication of cultural superiority on his part and of a more restricted, limited notion of what culture means. (More recently Zebrowska has confirmed that from her sample, the drift

<sup>4</sup> S. Patterson, ‘The Poles: An Exile Community in Britain’, in Watson (ed.), *Between Two Cultures. Migrants and Minorities in Britain*, Oxford, 1977, p. 240.

<sup>5</sup> V. Greene, ‘The Poles’, *The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, 1980, p. 802.

<sup>6</sup> W.A. Zbyszewski, ‘Syberia obozowa w Anglii’, *Kultura* (Paris), 9/35 (1950), p. 91.

away from Polishness seemed to be more associated with a working-class than a middle-class background.)<sup>7</sup>

Writing almost a quarter of a century later, Bohdan Brodziński observed it as a 'fact' that 'after thirty years' existence our emigration is falling apart and disappearing'. Brodziński drew attention though not, as Zbyszewski had done, to the 'low cultural level' of many of the rank and file, but to the origins of the Polish settlement in political exile. He referred to the 'emotional baggage' surrounding their exodus and exile which was not present in other emigrant groups:

... this common emotional baggage has resulted in the creation of a system of goals which again diverges radically from the patterns of normal migratory groups. In our system of goals the maintenance of our own group distinctiveness occupies a prime position.<sup>8</sup>

It is this turning in upon itself, a kind of ghetto mentality even if not ghettoized physically, which has been the subject of so much discussion in the Polish press since 1989. Indeed if we turn to the factors which have hastened the assimilation of the Polish group since the late 1940s, I would maintain that the émigré ethos has been one. The 'system of goals' — ideological and political — which the emigracja set itself were remote both in time and space for the second generation. The combatant ethic which underpinned these goals and the repetitious commemoration of national and wartime anniversaries of recent and not so recent history held little relevance for generations which had not experienced either childhood in independent Poland or the travails of wartime exile and combat. Hence the comments about 'time-warps' from members of the younger generation.

These goals were, in many senses, incompatible with the aspirations for long term group maintenance. It seems that this is a similar conclusion to that arrived at by Zebrowska when she writes that many of her respondents 'found difficulty in reconciling the model of Polishness into which they are socialized with their present effective biculturalism'.<sup>9</sup> This combined with a restricted (proscriptive) and intolerant concept of what it meant to be Polish — in terms of language facility, historical and cultural knowledge — which effectively excluded many who would have perhaps have been willing, even eager, to participate in group life. Cultures adapt, or they die. The culture of the Polish community in

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<sup>7</sup> A. Zebrowska, 'Integration or Assimilation? A Study of Second Generation Poles in England', PhD thesis, University of Surrey, 1986, p. 217.

<sup>8</sup> B. Brodziński, 'Sprawa Polska Ltd.', *Kultura* (Paris), 9/324 (1974), p. 109. Brodziński then went on to write (p. 110) that 'half' of the emigrants were people who had arrived in later years and so there were no objective (i.e. demographic) reasons for the group to disappear. He was presumably referring to the arrival of Polish females and the 'balancing' of the sexes, lessening the need for Polish males to marry 'out'.

<sup>9</sup> A. Zebrowska, 'Integration or Assimilation?' (quoted from abstract).



Britain could not remain as it was in 1930s Warsaw, or even in 1950s London, with the emergence of a second and third generation. Circumstances dictate that, in anything other than a ghetto existence, the culture of the host society plays an increasingly significant part in the socializing of younger generations — schooling, peer group culture and the media all play their part. Other factors affecting the cohesion/assimilation of the Polish community have been the conditions surrounding its settlement — the initial geographical dispersal and the demographic imbalance which led to exogamy of many Polish males. These are considerations which affect all minorities and which the leadership of the *emigracja*, even had it interested itself in such questions was powerless to alter.

Yet another element in hastening assimilation has been the role of the Roman Catholic church as a ‘religious melting pot’. Minority groups often rely heavily on a distinctive religious tradition to help preserve their separateness and sense of individual identity. The Polish Catholic tradition is long and distinctive and holds many attractions even for the younger generation, but for linguistic reasons as much as anything it is failing to retain the allegiance of more than a small percentage of those of Polish origin. Despite the large number of Polish priests in Great Britain, it is unlikely that such a contingent will avoid being reduced over the next twenty to thirty years, as the numbers of the community they serve contract even further and parishes cease to be viable. Discussions at the Polish Catholic Mission over the future needs of the community have thrown up scenarios in which the number may be reduced to between fifteen and twenty within a generation.

A further consideration in this list of factors hastening assimilation must be the relatively fluid nature of British society itself. Some respondents have claimed that Britain is a society in which there is intolerance of minority identities — particularly with reference to those born in Britain. Claims to ethnic loyalty or identification on the part of people who have received their education here and work and live in Britain are, it is suggested, seen as disloyal, as renegade. However widespread this experience is, I consider that the openness of Western democratic society — including Britain — and the scope for individual mobility is an element of advantage for members of ethnic minorities, if not for the ethnic group itself.<sup>10</sup> Much, of course, as I have tried to

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<sup>10</sup> Zygmunt Nowakowski recognized many years ago that the openness of British society was the greatest challenge that the Polish community had to meet in maintaining cultural identity and cohesion: ‘There may be one means, and it is a radical one, of maintaining Polishness but the British would have to help us, and that is by persecuting Polishness at each step. If children in schools here received the strap for speaking Polish, if we were conscripted and sent to Malaya or to Korea, if only from time to time a group of policemen would surround the Polish church at Devonian Road or started to harass spectators at a Polish theatre production? ... then, Dog’s teeth, we’d show them what kind of

indicate earlier, depends upon the values, skills and orientations of the ethnic group and its members — for example, the extent to which they hold education in high esteem as a means to social advancement. Michael Walzer has written of American ethnic groups that individual mobility is the special value, but also the characteristic weakness, of American pluralism since

... it makes for loose relations between centre and periphery; it generates a world without boundaries. In that world the vitality of the centre is tested by its ability to hold on to its peripheral men and women and to shape their self-images and their convictions.<sup>11</sup>

It is a characteristic of all Western societies (although few to the same degree and extent as in the United States) that while the freedoms they offer enable ethnic groups to pursue minority cultural agendas untroubled, it is paradoxically that very freedom which most threatens the cohesion of the ethnic group in the long run. Such 'erosion' is particularly noticeable among the highly educated and upwardly mobile. It is true that there are always those educated elements whose commitment to ethnic ways, sense of duty and obligation is sufficiently strong to retain them at least partially within the institutions of the minority community. A further important consideration for such people is the sense of 'defending traditional family and moral values' in the face of the perceived breakdown of society in modern Britain. I have suggested that here above all a 'critical mass' of like-minded individuals is essential.

Nevertheless, those respondents who voiced an opinion on the future of the Polish community tended to be pessimistic, some with a tinge of regret or nostalgia. A teacher in his thirties, brought up in the Bradford community, commented:

I am very pessimistic. I can't see the Polish community surviving. Some people will retain the language and some of the culture, some of the traditions. But as a community I think it will only last another generation or so.... I can't really see it surviving.<sup>12</sup>

Another respondent in Leicester, active within the Polish community and, like the previous respondent, with a spouse from Poland, observed 'One hopes that it will last a little longer — that there will be something for our children. We are trying to keep it going for them — but then it's up to them....'<sup>13</sup> This respondent estimated that some thirty people disappeared

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Poles we are. Unfortunately the British are not that stupid. They are very clever....' (*Dziennik Polski*, 8 October 1950).

11 M. Walzer, 'Pluralism: A Political Perspective', *The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, p. 377.

12 Tape B/17/JP.

13 Tape B/23/GW.



from the community there every year — although repeated the point made by many others interviewed that attendance at *pasterka* and *święcone* traditions swelled church attendances as people visited their families for the holidays and resumed the traditions of their childhood. Even the traditional activities on religious feast days are not enough to tempt some people back into involvement. Asked if the drift away from Polish community life and ways was inevitable, a respondent in Manchester replied:

I know that a lot of the younger generation are just not interested. I mean even just a simple point will illustrate this.... At Christmas I was involved in *kołędowanie* (carol singing) — we do *kołędowanie* for the older generation. So I thought, 'Oh, I'll involve some of my friends', and I phoned a number of them. I said, 'Look, I'm coming round with the *harcerzy* (scouts) and *harcerki* (girl scouts). Can we come round on Wednesday night and sing you a few carols?' The answer was 'No, I'm not really interested in that any more, Ted.' I phoned about six or seven friends of mine, people I'd grown up with — both male and female, and the response was the same: 'We're not into that any more'.<sup>14</sup>

The decline in interest and participation in Polish organizational life among the second generation has been noted by Zebrowska.<sup>15</sup> However, the question arises of what Zebrowska terms the 'Polishness beyond the community'.<sup>16</sup> This Polishness is found in the informal links and networks that exist outside the Polish community's organizational structure — indeed, among people who would claim that, while being Polish, they do not 'belong' to the Polish community.

Bogusia Temple has argued that there is a tendency in the literature on Poles in Britain to focus on coherence and groups, rather than on dissonance and individuals. She writes further:

I am arguing for the importance for research on British Poles of redefining the notion of community to include the backstage activities of informal groupings. These are as much a part of the community as its formal organisations.<sup>17</sup>

There is much in what Temple says, especially in her argument against reducing Polish identity to a 'core' of identifiable cultural markers. She is right, perhaps, also to object to Zebrowska's distinction between 'weak' and 'strong' Poles — certainly to the criteria used for distinguishing between them. Although there is a tendency for the academic observer to want to distinguish between the more committed and enthusiastic participants in community life, the 'freeloaders' and disenchanted self-exiled. There are many ways in which people see themselves as Polish, as quotations in the above text illustrate.

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14 Tape B/18/TR.

15 A. Zebrowska, 'Integration or Assimilation?', p. 82.

16 Ibid., pp. 374ff.

17 B. Temple, *Polish Identity and Community*, Manchester, 1994, p. 20.

Temple is certainly right too about the importance of informal groupings. Again, material in the above study makes clear that there is a reluctance to take part in formal Polish community activities (and even to patronize its premises) which still remaining 'in touch' with a Polish social network. The only point I would make here is that informal groupings exist not only of second-generation Poles, but also of the newer arrivals.

This study has concentrated on a more formal, conventional approach to the Polish community. It has focused on the obvious and visible aspects of community organization while attempting to examine the attitudes of younger-generation Poles to their identity and background. The study of informal groups and social networks is one possible direction for future research. It is one which would be more easily carried out using an anthropological fieldwork approach, than by orthodox sociological questionnaire methods. Such a study might investigate to what extent networks of second-generation and 'newcomer' Poles exist, to what extent the two overlap, what were the bases for their formation and continuity, and in what way they interact with the more formal institutions of the Polish community.

At present, as this and other studies have shown, the Polish community is in decline — as indicated by the conventional measures of organizational membership and participation. It has failed to hold the loyalties of its younger members and to tap the energies of many of the new arrivals. Whether this situation can be changed is difficult to say. The present 'community' (using the word in its narrower sense), seems to offer little attraction to such people, either in terms of 'interest' (rational pursuit of resources, social or material advancement) or in terms of 'affect' (an emotional, sentimental pull). While it is rash to make predictions, it seems likely — unless unforeseen changes take place — that only London and a handful of provincial metropolitan centres will retain organized Polish communities of any viability in twenty years' time.





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